

SPEC

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**Special
Theme
Issue:
OVER
THE
EDGE**

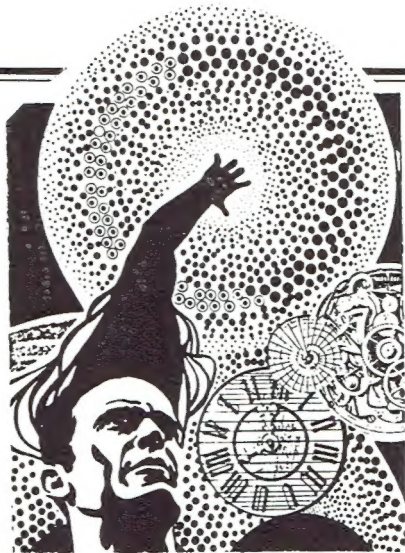


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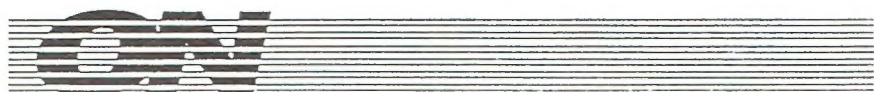
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THIS ISSUE

by Jena Snyder

"Safe" . . .

When we first started publishing *ON SPEC*, a reviewer declared that the magazine was "too safe." We didn't like the comment much, and we certainly didn't agree with it. But it made us wonder—how "safe" were we? Were we guilty of turning away stories because they contained some socially-unacceptable element? Were we putting together a nice, bland, inoffensive magazine so we wouldn't upset granting agencies? Were we afraid to run stories that would anger some political or ethnic or religious group?

Sure, I'll admit we rejected controversial work from time to time, but never because of content, or theme. What we turned away, we did so because we felt the writing itself wasn't strong enough, or the theme (or characters, or plot . . .) wasn't fully developed. We've rejected graphic horror stories that were competently written . . . but unoriginal. We've sent back sexually explicit work because when you wiped the steam off the glass . . . there was no plot.

On the other hand, our 1992 Humour Issue certainly ruffled feathers, as did any number of stories in other issues. So if we were already publishing work that we considered "unsafe," why go for a entire issue of "Over the Edge" work?

. . . versus "unsafe"

In a magazine editor's life, there is only one part of the job that equals the thrill of calling an author and asking, "Can we buy your story?" That's reaching into the slushpile

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and discovering a story so powerful, it blows you clean off your easy chair.

There are stories here that were perfectly acceptable to one editor, but utterly offensive to another. We knew we had to look at the quality and strength of the writing first, and actual content last. If we were going to be successful in this effort, we had to set aside personal likes and dislikes, and choose stories that were both well-written and, at the same time, "Over the Edge."

To us, an "Over the Edge" story pushes the bounds of general acceptability, and likely has an adult theme. It goes beyond formula, taking risks with style or character handling or use of language, rewriting the rules while gleefully tromping on the toes of the establishment.

It might also shock or offend you, or cause you to examine your preconceived notions—or your politics, or

religious beliefs, or even your idea of what's funny. You may not agree with its premise, but it makes you sit back and think.

It has many layers, and can be interpreted in different ways, depending on how deep you delve. Often, what you see on the surface—and this includes artwork, too—is not the same thing you find when you start peeling away the layers.

The trick is, any one of these pieces could easily overwhelm a regular issue, stealing the spotlight and leaving the other stories in its shadow. The way to get around that, we decided, was to gather all the controversial stories together in one wild and crazy issue.

So after reading our "Over the Edge" choices, you be the judge: Is *ON SPEC* "too safe"?

By the way . . . don't say we didn't warn you. ☸

EXTRAS, EXTRAS

Apologies to ALICE MAJOR, whose name was omitted from our list of Board members for our last issue.

Welcome to our NEW SUBSCRIBERS. What with our lead time, this is our first chance to say "hi!" to all the SF readers who joined us through our subscription campaign. We hope you enjoy your next year(s) with us. Plans for 1993 include a Fall feature on the Aurora Award winners (which will be announced at Wilfcon this March) and another novel excerpt this Winter. All you writers should note that the deadline for our next theme issue, on "hard SF" is August 31, 1993, with the issue due out in Spring of '94.

Watch for *ON SPEC* personnel at an SF event near you, especially in Western Canada. We will be reading and critiquing and running a booth at the Alberta Book Fair on February 15 in Edmonton. At least one of us will be travelling to ConVersion, V-Con, Noncon, and, we hope, Ad Astra. Come on up and say hello!

You are invited to an "OVER THE EDGE"
release party

Vampires & Voodoo:

"a different kind of Mardi Gras"

at That Place Upstairs (10545 Whyte Ave.)

Saturday, February 20, 1993

The evening starts at 8 pm, with readings from the new "OVER THE EDGE" issue. Then there's a theme dance, "VAMPIRES & VOODOO"! It's Mardi Gras in steamy New Orleans, and the undead stalk the streets amongst the unsuspecting revellers. Wear your party duds, or your best shroud, and dance the night away. Tickets for this fundraising event are \$10 in advance. Ticket price includes free munchies and costume prizes.



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(Theme: *Hard SF*)

Nov. 30/93 for Summer 1994

All submissions must be in **CONTEST FORMAT**: no author name on manuscript. Enclose self-addressed, stamped envelope with sufficient postage to cover return of manuscript, and covering letter with name, address, phone number, and word count. If manuscript is disposable, indicate in covering letter. More details, page 95.

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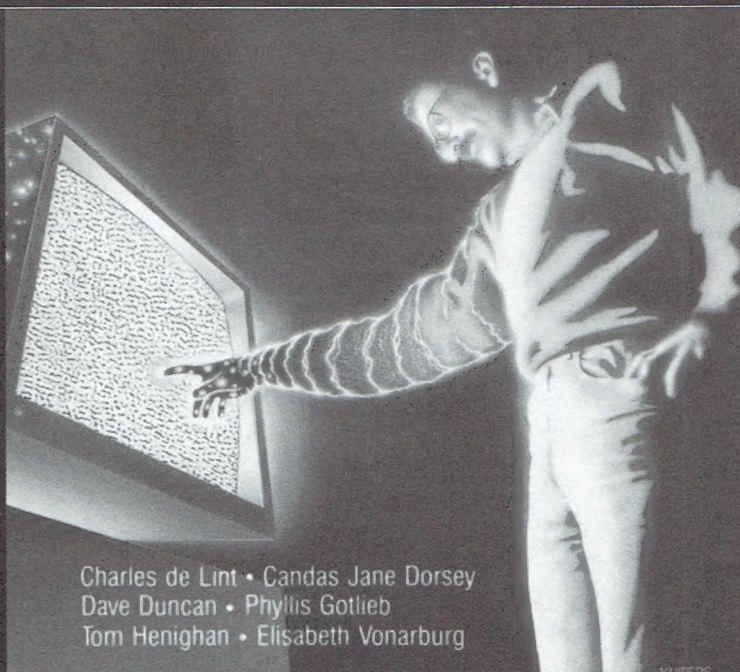
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Kissing Hitler

by Erik Jon Spiegel
illustrated by Jim Beveridge

"We dedicate this film with the hope that these heinous crimes will never occur again."

— Herman Traeger,
Producer, *Ilsa, She-Wolf of the SS*

"Bobby O, what's a Jew?"

Bobby is hefting the last of the boards for my mother's real-wood shelf through the dilator. He's wearing a white, sleeveless *Bundeswehr* undershirt and black G-string, his sunglasses inserted down the back, one of its folded arms tucked you-know-where. I'm watching kidvid on the twodee, an ancient history thing:

"TRIUMPH OF THE WILL"

a title on the screen.

"Three Days of Peace."

in retro-script. Then:

"5 September 1934"

which I have to query to find out is a date. I call up a calculator on the touch screen to do the subtraction:

Today it's	2634
(according to the computer)	
minus	1934
	<hr/>
equals	700

So it's seven hundred years ago. And according to the *Institute of Historical Review* blurb at the beginning, it's about Jews. So I ask again.

"Bobby O, what's a Jew?"

"I don't know, Kendra. I think it's a cult." Then, raising his voice so the computer will get the message, "Am I right?"

The computer delicately coughed to indicate it was listening.

"I'll work on it," it said.

So I turn back to the vid. I've seen *Triumph of the Will* oodles of times before; it's one of my faves, even if I don't know what a Jew is. Anyway, it's got this beautiful opening shot flying over some fields, looking down at the plane with Adolf Hitler and Arlo Guthrie on it, intercut with shots of guys assembling the stage for the concert.

Sometimes the colour washes out, but the fuzzy in the twodee remembers me watching the film before, and colour corrects as it goes on. It's subtitled; it has to be. No-one today can understand that weird English they spoke back then. In fact, until a few years ago, they used to think it was *two* languages being spoken!

The computer coughs again just at the Hitler Youth Boys' Camp bit, which I can tell Bobby likes, because

he's absently running a finger up and down his G-string, looking at all those half-clad Hipi boys frolicking. There's a nude man with long hair on the screen, sitting by a pond, saying how he'd never have even considered swimming in the nude before, but now believes it's the only way to do it. I laugh because I still can't believe anyone ever cared about that kind of thing.

"I have some information," the computer began. "*Triumph of the Will* is a reconstructed composite print edited together from remains of various twentieth-century recording media during a nostalgic revival of two-dimensional entertainment forms that took place approximately twenty-two years ago. Some of these scraps still defy reconstruction, as many crucial elements are believed to be missing. The film you are watching is a recounting of the trials and tribulations of an ancient group of people who were alternately known as 'Nazis,' which was an abbreviation of their full name, *National Sozialisten*, a political group, like our own Union Gospel Party, and also known as 'Hipis,' which was a way of running together the initials 'HP,' which stood for *Hitler Partei*.

"They had something to do with Jews," the computer concluded.

"Something to do with Jews?" I shrieked. "I already knew that! I want to know what a Jew is!"

Hitler had just finished reviewing the troops and Joe Cocker was

coming on stage to sing, "I Get By With A Little Help From My Friends."

"I guess I misunderstood," the computer said. "I'll see what I can do. Meanwhile, I'll come up with a bibliography of relevant sources for you."

"What's a bibliography?"

"Books," the computer sighed. "Hard copy."

"Would you both please shut up? I'm trying to hear this!"

Bobby O can be such a prig, sometimes.

"You're supposed to be building my mother's real-wood shelf."

"Later, later. Look at the way that guy moves! It's like he was a puppet or something."

"That 'guy' is *Joe Cocker*. Hitler's foremost *Reichsmarshal* and parade music composer. I think he knew Wagner."

I pronounced it 'wag' like a dog's tail, which brought a prompt correction from the computer.

"Kendra, it is pronounced *Vogner*."

"So big deal; he's dead now, isn't he? Like he's going to complain."

The computer coughed again just as Cocker was finishing.

"Here are your books," it said flatly. Computers, as a rule, have a certain distaste for hard copy, and ours was no exception. It spat about five bound volumes through a slot in the floor.

The first was the Classic Comics *Mein Kampf*, which I already had,

so I dumped it back in the chute. The other four had lots of pictures, and I started thumbing through them. There was a picture of all these emaciated people being lined up for some sort of shower or something, a big metal chamber with a fire going on underneath it—for hot water, I figured; I knew they had it tough back then. There was an inset picture of somebody's arm with some numbers tattooed on it.

"Cool," I muttered. I wouldn't mind getting a skin-blast like that.

Another book had a bunch of old guys with beards wearing weird-looking nametags: six triangles arranged around a hexagon. There were more pictures of emaciated people, and lots of pictures of people wearing rags and looking pretty upset, God knows why. Oh, yeah; and there was this one picture of a lamp! I don't know why they'd have a picture of a lamp in a book on Nazis and Jews.

I plopped myself down beside Bobby O again in front of the twodee. Jon Sebastian was doing his singalong with the shovel guys. That's what I call them, anyway. It's just some guys in black uniforms hoisting gold shovels on their shoulders and marching around. But it looks cool and they sing good.

"I'm thinking of checking it out," I say to Bobby O.

"Why not? It looks like a trip."

"I mean, Mom said I'm old enough to use the Wayback, didn't she? It's not like it's dangerous or

anything."

"Like I said, it looks like a trip. You should go."

"I don't just want to go there, though. I want to do something really wild. Something really on the edge once I'm there."

"Like what?"

"Like anything. I don't know; I'm still thinking about it."

So I thought. Dietrich was warning the crowd about the brown acid.

The computer coughed.

"I think I have what you want, now. According to Jewish law, Jewishness is inherited matrilineally. I've accessed your genealogy charts: according to them, two hundred years ago, one of the last declared Jews was a woman on your mother's side; she had a daughter, who had a daughter . . . Well, to spare you all the permutations and combinations, Kendra, *you* are a Jew."

"Whoopee! I'm a Jew! I'm a Jew!"

"You're really only half a Jew." Bobby O was reading a hardcopy the computer begrudgingly provided. "Your father almost certainly was not a Jew."

I ignored him.

"Is 'Kendra' a good Jewish name?" I asked the computer.

"No, it's Celtic."

"Am I a Celt?"

"You're a mongrel," Bobby said.

"Your mother was descended from Jews and by Jewish law is a Jew, which makes you a Jew. Your father is Chinese, to use the ancient

term. You have his last name: *Chang*. If you wish more detail, I can take a blood test and send the results to the archaeogenetics laboratory computer in Geneva."

"No," I said solemnly. "It is enough that I am a Jew."

I rose as Hendrix played the national anthem, signalling the closing ceremony of the Woodstock Hippi Concert in Nuremberg. I was overwhelmed with emotion. Imagine! Me, Kendra Chang, a Jew, whatever that was. I could kiss somebody.

Hitler was drawing a standing ovation from the crowd.

"That's what I'm going to do, Bobby O. I'm going to go back and kiss Hitler."

"Hess was cuter," he said.

"No, no. It has to be Hitler. If it wasn't for Hitler, I'd never know I was a Jew."

The last scene is a guy and his girlfriend walking through the park where they had the concert; there's litter everywhere and, like, these two are the last to leave. Their backs are to the camera. The guy's wearing a black vest with a painting on the back: a white omega enclosing a red peace sign superimposed on which is a white swastika. I freeze-frame and highlight the vest, asking the computer to make me one. Oh, yeah; I got some ideas, now.

The Wayback Gate is a big, open square frame with rounded corners. It glows violet just at the edge of UV when the Wayback's

operating. The Wayback Machine itself is a featureless black box mounted on top. It has displays, of course: when you are, when you're going . . . but you have to piggy it with the home computer to get the spacetime coordinates right.

The remote is a gold armband that looks like a long glove with only one finger. Even then, the finger is exposed from the first knuckle up to the tip. You can only slip the glove on or off in your home time; it can't be removed when you go back, so you never get stranded. There are five buttons down the top of the armband: PAUSE, RECALL, GO/RESUME, FAST FORWARD, and STOP/RETURN. When I wear the glove, the controls only work for me. The Wayback's loaded with safety features.

To get anywhere, I just set the Wayback through the home computer, press GO/RESUME, and step through the glowing frame. Once I'm where I want to be, I can stop the flow of time around me with PAUSE, redo a sequence by going back a few minutes or hours with RECALL, skip a boring bit with FAST FORWARD, or come home with STOP/RETURN. If I lose consciousness for any reason (even sleep), I automatically return. There are explorer models of Wayback that don't do this, but the home models are built to protect. Hey, who wants history to hurt?

I'm thinking the easiest thing to do is show up during one of the shots

in *Triumph of the Will*. I mean, I've got a specific date, right? September 5, 1934. And the computer can check the sun's position and even set me down at the exact time of day for any scene I want to be in. There's a motorcade at the beginning where Hitler's driving among all these party supporters, kissing babies and women, and stuff like that. So I get everything cued up.

"Big deal," Bobby O says.

"What do you mean, 'Big deal'? I'm going to be in a movie."

"No, you're not."

"But the computer's going to drop me right in the middle—"

"I don't care what the computer says it's going to do. You aren't going to be in the movie or else we'd see you in the movie right now."

Oh, yeah.

"Maybe I end up on the cutting room floor? That would make sense. Mom says the paradox buffer in the Wayback doesn't permit any setting that could screw up the time stream, and it *did* allow me to be sent where I wanted. Or maybe I'm on a piece of film that never made it to our time. They say there are whole acts they know about but can't find any film of. Like Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Himmler singing 'Teach Your Children Well.'"

"Hmph," said Bobby O. He hates it when I outsmart him. "Even so, the motorcade scene's too easy. Hitler's already predisposed to kissing there. There's no challenge. What you want to do is find some place

where it's going to take him completely by surprise. He's got to be surrounded by security, too. It's got to be tough."

"Are you daring me to do it, Bobby O?"

"Well, let's just say I have my doubts."

"You're on. If I win, I get to go anywhere I want without an argument, and you have to cover for me with Mom." Mom said I could use the Wayback whenever I wanted, but not without someone there to supervise.

"Fine. And if I win?"

"I'll build Mom's real-wood shelf for you, and tell her you did it."

"Deal."

We shook on it.

But now I was back to the beginning. Where should I show up? After the motorcade, Hitler goes into this chalet and up to the second floor, from which he addresses a crowd of the townspeople. Maybe I could be in the house on his way up, and surprise him on the stairs? He's got security people with him there. Probably it's too private to impress Bobby, though. He wants something dramatic.

I try setting the Wayback for Hitler's closing speech at the end of the movie, but the paradox buffer locks the event out.

I guess they did that scene in one take. It shows. Hitler looks like a silly, fruity, middle-aged man, the kind of guy Bobby O's crowd refer

to as a "queenie."

So I settle for a scene just before the end. It's a big mass assembly at this monument. The place is just lousy with Nazis. It's a daytime scene, which I guess is good. Hitler mounts a huge stone platform and gives a pep-talk to the party Youth. It's a great scene. It's shot beautifully, with three swastika banners flapping in the background, and acres of men in uniform all mesmerized by the party leader. I already know I can go there; I checked it with the Wayback and the paradox buffer gave it the green light. The problem is that it scares the cramps out of me.

I try to sell Bobby O on a different scene. There's a folkparade, with all these Hipis dressed in traditional German garb, all lined up to watch another parade with Hitler. It's like the scene at the beginning I wanted to be in, and Bobby nixes it for the same reasons.

So I'm stuck with doing my thing in broad daylight in front of a zillion people.

Bobby offers me an out.

"If you're chicken, you can just build the shelf for me. I won't tell anyone."

He's so sure I'm going to take him up on it, he goes ahead and makes plans for himself for the afternoon. God, I hate it when he's smug like this.

So while he's interfacing with his gayjay boyfriends I set the Wayback and just do it, knowing he'll come by, expecting me to be putting his

damn shelf together, and instead finding the Wayback glowing and the controls set for Nuremberg. Ha!

The Wayback drops me off just outside the grounds where the assembly is, right where I want to be. I surprise the hell out of a cameraman who drops a film canister as I suddenly appear out of thin air. I'm no fool, though. I immediately hit PAUSE, stopping everything around me, and make my way to the monument.

Based on the film, I figure I'm dressed pretty unobtrusively. I'm wearing my new vest of course, but under it I've got a wicked tie-dye swastika T-shirt, same colour scheme as Hendrix's, a mini-skirt, and a pair of exact replicas of real Nazi Stormtrooper boots. I look aces.

I've got a headband on, too, which is perfect because it hides my autophraser. I've got a bonephone planted just behind my left ear, and my sunglasses are in fact my heads-up display, giving me a constant translation of what's being said, and supplying me with phonetic transcriptions of proper words and phrases, appropriate to any situation I might find myself in. Hey, when I travel, I travel in style.

Stupid me, however, I left in such a hurry I forgot to download a map of the compound into the autophraser, so I promptly get lost. Obviously I'm going to have to ask for directions. I hit GO/RESUME.

The guard just stares at me. What can I say? I'm gorgeous.

I know it.

"*Entschuldigan mie,*" I say. "*Where ist dein Hipien?*" Remembering to pronounce it "*Vare,*" like Vogner.

"*Ein Chinesin!*" the guard exclaims.

"*Dein Hipien,*" I prompt him. "*Where ist dein Hipien?*"

"*Ein Chinesin sprechet Jiddisch!*"

This isn't going anywhere.

"Hitler?" I try. "*Machen mie zu Hitler?*"

"*Ja, ja. Hitler. Kommen mit mich.*"

The autophraser just isn't getting any of this. All I've got is the occasional word—in this case, "Come"—and lines and lines of question marks. But the guard makes his meaning clear enough, cocking his gun and jabbing the bayonet into my back. I hope he doesn't cut me with it; the remote gauntlet will sense the loss of blood and send me home. Then I'll be stuck building Bobby's lousy shelf.

Oh, that would be so frustrating! Especially now, because we're going *exactly* where I want to. It's so close, I can feel it. We round a couple of pylons, pass a couple of camera platforms, and there's the stone block where Hitler's going to make his speech. As we go up the stairs, I can see the man, himself, in conference with the director, what's her name, Riefenstahl.

"*Heil Hitler!*" The guard says behind me.

Hitler turns. He looks like a

fruity old man up close, too. "*Ein Chinesin!*" the *Führer* exclaims.

"Ja, ja!" The guard agrees. "*Ein Chinesin sprechet Jiddisch!*"

"*Ein jüdisch Chinesin?*" Hitler is taken aback.

The autophraser's fuzzy is starting to pick up on some of this. At the very least, I get it that they've picked up on the fact that I'm Jewish. I immediately snap to attention.

"Ja. Jüdin. Mie." I just know these guys love Jews. I can see it now: a state reception, maybe I'll even be given an honorary rank in the SS. Kendra Chang, *Reichsmarshal* Jew from the Future.

Hitler does a slow three-sixty around me, then shrugs.

"*Streicher*," he says, nodding me off the platform.

"*Streicher?* No way. Gross!" I lapse back into my-speak, completely ignoring the autophraser. Streicher was the nimrod in the film who was rattling on about racial purity. The guy looked like a herring. Yuck.

Hitler came real close, then, with this creepy smile on his face. His breath smelled like urine.

"Ja," he said, nodding, savouring the word. "*Streicher. Die Jüdin weiss ber Streicher. Streicher gefallen finden an sie.*"

It's now or never. I shoot forward, holding my breath, and wrap my arms around his neck. I get one good lip press out of it before they yank me off of him. I hear guns being cocked everywhere, so I hit STOP/RETURN and I'm gone.

Bobby's waiting for me.

"Hold it!" he says, before I can say anything.

He whips out a swab and wipes my lips and the inside of my mouth, then drops it into a plastic tube and that into one of the computer slots.

"Right. Now don't forget to download the autophraser."

All I want to do is rinse and spit. God knows what Nazis ate back then. But I link the autophraser to the computer first; whatever it learned about the language will be incorporated into an update on the next language program. Plus, it records a lot of what happened, so I can prove to Bobby O that I really kissed Hitler.

"I got the computer to analyze your saliva; it'll send the results to Geneva for analysis. I know you can play with the autophraser, but you can't fake genetics."

The computer coughed.

"Geneva says that the saliva sample consists of the mingled secretions of two individuals. The first belongs to Chang comma Kendra to one hundred per cent certainty. The second sample is awaiting cross check with Geneva archaeogenetics facility. Waiting . . . Waiting . . . The second sample belongs to Hitler comma Adolph to eighty-one per cent certainty, based on reconstructive cross check."

"Hmph," was all Bobby O said. "You win."

"Oh, yeah. Like there was ever any doubt. So now I can go any-

where I want?"

"That was the deal."

"Okay. I want to go to a concentration camp. That was *the* in place for Jews back then." Hey, I do my homework.

Bobby O grew fidgety.

"I don't know, Kendra. I've got a bad feeling about letting you take off just anywhere."

"Oh, come on, Bobby! That was the deal!"

"I'm just not sure, now . . . Your mother . . ."

"Oh, for God's sake, Bobby! It's not like it's real or anything; it's just history. If it gets bad, I can always just hit STOP and forget about it."

"I don't know. I just don't know. If you come back with anything worse than a scratch, you know what your mother will do to me."

"Fuck it, Bobby. I'm going. You said I could go anywhere I wanted to, so I'm going to a concentration camp."

"Well, where are these concentration camps?"

"Same place: Germany. I even know which one. Auschwitz. I've heard good things."

"Okay, so it's Auschwitz. The Wayback okay it?"

"I haven't checked. But I know it's going to be okay. All I gotta do is be in a place called Warsaw any time after June, 1940, and the Nazis will even pick me up and give me a ride there."

Bobby was checking a bunch of things out on the computer.

"That's good that they'll give you a ride, because neither the Wayback, nor the computer, nor the history archives in Geneva have any record of a place called Auschwitz. Are you sure it's a real place?"

"Oh, yeah, yeah. I'm sure. I read it in a book. Doesn't anybody read books any more? Honestly. It was quite the place, crowded all the time, huge line-ups for the showers. They celebrated its opening with this big do called *kristallnacht*, which means 'Crystal Night.' Beautiful, huh? Crystal Night. Ooh, I can't wait! I'm going to go right now!"

This time I dumped every map I could into the autophraser, and set the Wayback for Warsaw, which was in a place called Poland, for the year 1940 and the month of August. The Wayback didn't reject the co-ordinates. I hit GO/RESUME, waited for the black frame of the Wayback to glow violet, and stepped back into history.

This time, no one saw me appear. I queried the phraser for a good place to wait for a ride. It flashed the word 'ghetto' on my sunglasses, and overlaid a map and directions. I PAUSED and made my way there.

What a dump!

I don't know what I was expecting, but this place was the pits. Hardly the kind of place you'd expect to have a party with name like Crystal Night. Like, I was expecting a little mess, right. Maybe some champagne glasses thrown in the streets, but not this. Everywhere there

were windows boarded up, and torn posters with that hexagon-triangle design peeling from the walls.

The word "*Jüden*" was spray-painted in red over almost all unpostered surfaces, dripping like blood.

It was deserted.

I hit FAST FORWARD, hoping to speed up the action. Presently, a Nazi truck rounded a corner in fast motion, coming my way. In fact, I nearly let it go right by me, and had to hit RECALL to go back a few seconds.

"Hey!" I shouted, waving my arms. "*Jüdin! Mie!*"

The truck skidded to a halt and a troop of burly looking Hipi types jumped from the back.

"*Ein Chinesin!*" one of them shouted.

"*Nein, nein,*" I said. "*Jüdin. Mie Jüdin.*"

"*Ein Chinesin sprechet Jiddisch!*"

"*Ein jüdisch Chinesin!*"

Here we go again.

I decide not to be subtle. After all, they're supposed to give every Jew a free ride to Auschwitz; I can't help it if I don't look Jewish enough for them. I'm not going to miss out on my ride.

"*Jüdin mie. Machen mie zu Auschwitz.*" I tell them.

One of them grabs my arms roughly and pushes me towards the truck. I nearly stumble. This isn't going well. If these dodos keep this up, the autoreturn's going to kick in.

Two guards on the bed of the truck hoist me up by my arms and dump me. This really hurts!

"Hey, you guys keep that up and I'm outta here!"

One of them punches me. Another is tying my hands behind my back. The guy who punched me picks me up and dumps me on a bench on one side of the truck. Two guards sit on either side of me. Six guards are squished on the bench opposite me.

The osteoresonator in my bonephone is screaming warnings at me. Bruised ribs. Abrasions on my right wrist and on both ankles from the rope. It's asking me if I want to return. I'm still not hurt bad enough for the autoreturn to kick in, and I can't move my hands enough to hit STOP/RETURN manually. But I want to go home. I want to go home. I want to go home.

I start to cry.

The guards are pointing at me, saying things I don't understand, and laughing at me. The autophraser's getting the gist of it: they're laughing at my clothes. Why did fucking Bobby let me come here? Just because he was going to have to cancel all his plans and build Mom's goddamn real-wood shelf. Fucking Bobby.

One of the guards keeps leering at me, pointing up my miniskirt.

"*Jüdisch fisch, ja?*" he says. The other guards laugh.

"*Ja,*" another one says. "*Geffilte fisch!*"

They all laugh even louder. The first guy uses the barrel of his rifle to try to push my skirt up.

"*Schweigen!*" one guard says, slapping the rifle away. The guards quiet down, muttering and giggling among themselves. This guy, I figure he's in charge, comes over and pins a yellow tag with that weird hexagon-triangle design on it to my vest.

"*Jüdin,*" he says, and spits at my feet.

I want to go home.

We're driving. If I could fall asleep, I could go home. The autoreturn would kick in, and all of this would disappear like it was a dream. But I'm scared. Everything's a blur. Somehow we've ended up at a train station, and hundreds of people with yellow tags are being loaded into the cars. I get unloaded and pushed in amongst the crowds. I'm too dazed to do anything. All I think about is going home.

It's too hot, too cramped on the train. It smells like poo. An older woman behind me is shrieking. A little girl hugs my legs and cries quietly.

The train stops. We're at Auschwitz.

A black-uniformed SS man sends the men one way, the women another. Some children are kept back, others are sent with the women. He takes an especial interest in the remote, and tries to pry it off. I almost laugh. He slaps me, and sends me with the women.

We get marched past a long line of emaciated people, same as in the picture in my book. Finally. I get a close look at one of the showers as we turn a corner. I watch them open the door to one of the stalls, and I see a pile of ashes and half-burned bones. I watch them put some men in it, and one of them trips on what's left of a skull. Then I watch them shut the door.

I stumble. I'm kicked. My hands are untied and I'm undressed. They take the autophraser, my sunglasses, my vest, my dress; everything. The phraser will decompose in about fifteen minutes after losing contact with my skin. My clothes will never last long enough to trouble any archaeologist. They try to take the remote again, and can't get it off. An SS man comes over. He and two other women guards are pointing to it and saying things I don't have a hope in hell of ever understanding.

Finally, the SS man shrugs.

"*Abschneiden die arm,*" he says, and walks off.

The two women guards pin me to my chair. A man grabs the arm with the remote on it and holds against it the table. Another man wearing a lab coat comes over with a scalpel and a saw.

"Oh God Oh God Oh God!" I scream. The scalpel goes into my upper arm and I'm home.

"Oh, shit," Bobby O says. "Your mother's going to kill me."

"I just want to go home," I cry.

"You're home. You're home,

already. What happened to your clothes? And the autophraser? That's a nasty slice; that'll take a couple hours for the autodoc to clean up. I hope you're satisfied."

"Oh, Christ, Bobby. They fucking kill people! The Nazis fucking kill people!"

"Bullshit."

"No, really. They just line them up and incinerate them."

"You expect me to believe that kind of crap? Face it, Chang; you screwed up big time and now you're just trying to weasel out of it. Everybody knows the Nazis never killed anybody. You're just pissed because you missed out on Crystal Night."

"I'm serious, Bobby . . ."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. Look, you're pretty battered. Maybe you took a bad fall. The doc'll clear the cobwebs from your brain and you'll see. You're just a bit delirious, is all. Concussion. You just need some rest."

Bobby O took me up to my room and hooked me up to the autodoc. I fell asleep instantly.

*

I woke up feeling great, with a couple of hours to spare before dinner. The doc had fixed my wound, and had given me a parapsychic in-

jection to help with the bad dreams I'd been having. All I could remember about the trip was a kind of vague sense of excitement, like I'd just watched a fright pic on the twodee. I couldn't remember much about Auschwitz. Like you go there, you leave. The truck part was better. I wouldn't go back. In fact, just forget about Auschwitz. I still don't know what a Jew is.

I switched on the twodee, and cued up another documentary. A lot of the music was the same as in *Triumph of the Will*. It looked promising. It all took place in these jungles, and everything was going up in flames. The aircars were really cool, too; they looked like dragonflies. There was even surfing. Lots of guys who looked like me were shooting at lots of guys who looked like Germans but weren't. The documentary said they were "Americans." The computer didn't know if I was an American. Everybody wore the same colour green.

Mom called up that it was dinner, so I hit the SAVE button on the twodee; I'd get back to the show later.

"Hey, Mom, I've got a question," I asked between Brussels sprouts. "Who was 'Viet Nam'?" •



THE RECORD

an afterword to "Kissing Hitler"

by Erik Jon Spigel

There were two principal catalysts for this story. The first was the anniversary of the Gulf War this year, which was barely a footnote on the national news broadcasts both here and in the U.S. I found this disturbing—an unbelievably short-term memory for an event that claimed, I believe, roughly two hundred thousand lives. History, even relatively recent history, no matter how dramatic, seems to be of almost no consequence to anyone, any more.

The second catalyst occurred when I was in my local video store, and looked at the shelves of B-films, a remarkable number of which had Nazi themes (including *Ilsa, She-Wolf of the SS*). It occurred to me rather cynically that this is what the fate of the Holocaust is to be: fodder for adolescent drivel. The event itself has no relevance now except as a sensationalistic device to capture market share . . . hence the irony of the quote which opens "Kissing Hitler." *Ilsa, She-Wolf of the SS* is nothing more than cheaply-produced pornography, the sole reason for its setting to provide thin rationale for its violent, sado-masochistic excess. It scares me even more to think that I am of the generation which grew up with

Hogan's Heroes; this generation has grown up with the idea that World War II was a bad sitcom, and that the SS were indistinguishable from the Keystone Cops, whoever *they* were . . .

A case-in-point: at a convention in 1989, Harlan Ellison recounted a story in which he made reference to a particular concentration camp, Dachau I believe it was, in an address to a group of *college students*, and one shot up her hand and asked what Dachau was. And then had to ask, more generally, what a concentration camp was.

The point is, even these events—the Gulf War, the Holocaust—are being lost to us, despite the fact that there are no history-destroying crises

in this century to obscure them. The past is dying not with a bang, but a whimper.

This is a central theme (there are many others besides: teenagers, television, etc.) in "Kissing Hitler," which I see as a cautionary tale based on Santayana's famous maxim, "Those who forget history are doomed to repeat it." No crises are necessary to occlude the events of the past; indifference is sufficient. Revisionists of all political stripes abound to further muddy the waters for us. While our technological knowledge expands at a breathtaking rate, nonetheless those subjects traditionally called "humanities"

atrophy.

Why are the computers in Kendra's time, despite their sophistication, so mixed up in their history? Garbage-in, garbage-out: despite their obvious technical complexity, someone still had to program them, and that someone was certainly prejudiced in their view of history. Thus the computers as they stand in the story are symbolic of the fact of high technical sophistication at the expense of development and the perceived relevancy of the so-called "social sciences," a trait which is becoming startlingly revealed as dominant in late twentieth-century human culture. •

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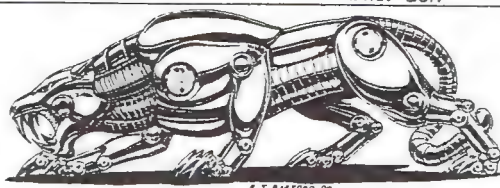
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Circle Dance

by Eileen Kernaghan

The First Figure:

A circle is a zone of magnified power. By concentrating energy within a confined space, the circle generates metaphysical resonances which manifest themselves in occult phenomena.

■

In order to begin any ritual circumstance a Circle must be cast. The Circle is generally nine feet in diameter. If possible, a permanent Circle should be painted or drawn on the floor. When this cannot be done, the Circle can be laid out with rope or string . . .

(A Book of Pagan Rituals)

Within the Magic Circle, which is green, are inscribed in flaming vermilion the infinitely various names of God. Outside the circle are nine pentagrams, equidistant. In the centre of each one a small lamp burns; these are the fortresses upon the frontiers of the abyss.

*

Through the Circle the magician affirms her identity with the infinite. At the same time she affirms the limitation imposed by her devotion to the Great Work. No more does she wander aimlessly through the world.

The Second Figure:

A circle is a one-dimensional shape perceived in two dimensions. Add a third and it becomes a tube, a cylinder, an orifice. Annular or probosciform, it takes on sexual connotations. The purity of the design is lost. Collapsed to a singularity, the circle sucks us through the event horizon into the regions of infinite density at the end of time.

*

Time is not linear, but circumambient. We are bathed in entropy as in amniotic fluid.

*

Time measures itself in rings of stone, in the moon's discarded shadow, in your face, your eyes.

*

Through the green circles of their years trees grow into time.

The Third Figure:

Five ways to think about the universe:
as a silver egg,
as a finite yet unbounded sphere,
as the Great Serpent that devours its tail,
as an ever-widening loop of string,
as a mandala circumscribed by fire.

*

A circle is that which remains when anything is subtracted from itself. Signifying nothing, it implies all possibilities. It is the starting point from which all measurements are reckoned.

*

The nature of God is a circle
*of which the centre is everywhere
and the circumference is nowhere.*

(attributed, variously, to Pascal; to *The Book of the Twenty-Four Philosophers*, an early mediaeval hermetic text; and to anon.)

*

In Her name praise all things circling, spiralling, whorled and cyclic. Praise orbs, spheres, helices, ellipses. Praise what spins, turns, revolves and gyrates. Praise moon and labyrinth and mirror. Praise pear. Praise pomegranate.

The Fourth Figure:

Love may be compared to the Circle of Perpetual Apparition: the boundary of that space around the elevated celestial pole within which the stars never set.

*

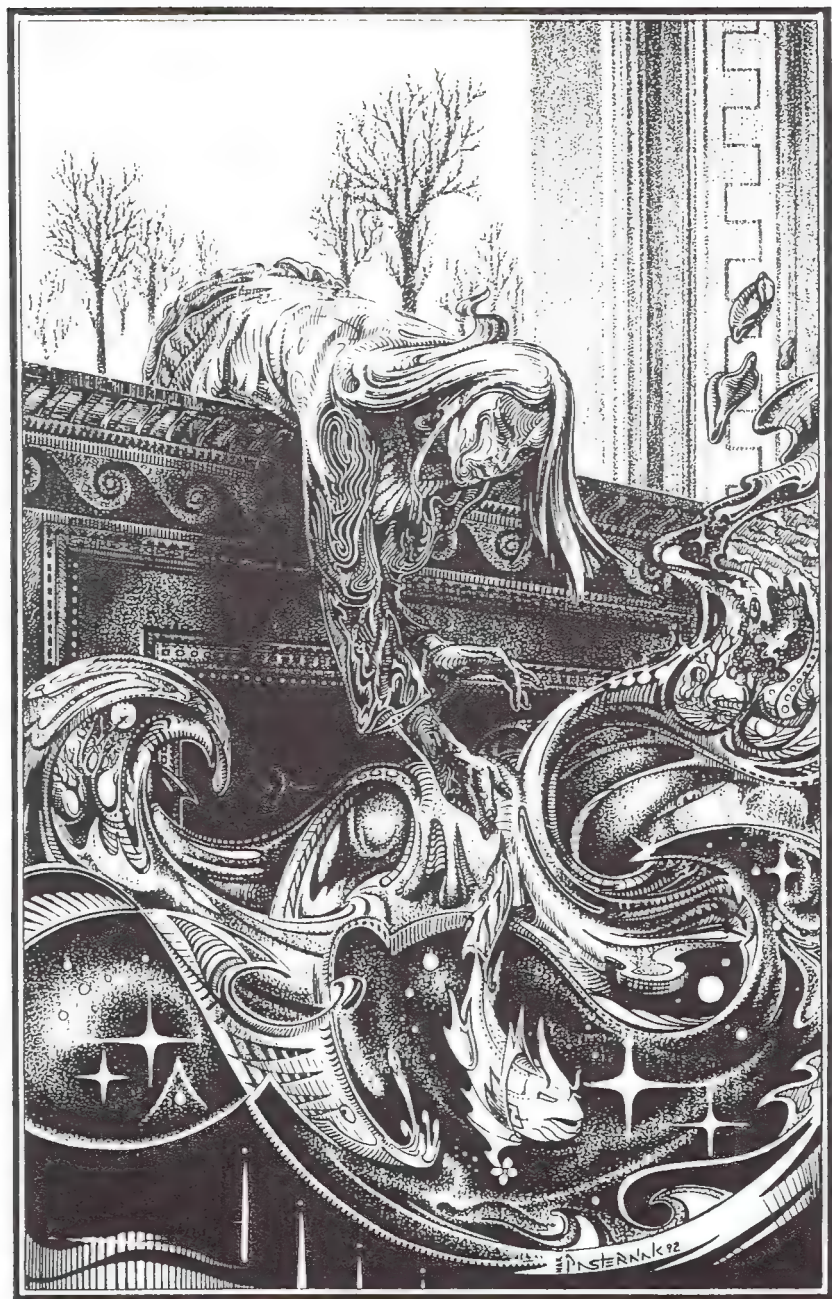
Awaken the coiled white serpent that sleeps below the belly. Enter the region of white light, the place of no sound in which all sound is imminent.

*

The language love speaks is circumspect, circuitous and circumlocutory.

*

Tonight your mouth is the circle
that defines my universe,
and I am the boundless circle
that surrounds you. (★)



Fish

for Vicky Husband

by M.A.C. Farrant

illustrated by Robert Pasternak

By day, carrying on with my fish body assembly work. By night, waking to find strangers in my bed. Last night, Mrs. Hanson and her three kids. A trial for a person.

Rip doesn't seem to mind the strangers. He just rolls over, grumbles about needing more covers, leaving me to contend.

By day, all is well. The important fish body assembly work continuing. But three nights ago, an elderly couple vacationing from Alberta. He, bald and snoring, she in hair net pondering. Maps and guidebooks spread out over the quilt.

It's the night time crowds I can't stand. Whole families arguing. Some under the covers with Rip and me, others sitting on the bedside nattering.

It's worse when I sweat because of too many people in our bed. Then I have to throw off the covers to get any relief and everyone starts in on me then, complaining. Many of the strangers don't like our bedroom, for in-

stance: no proper dresser, a doorless closet, the bed, merely a double. I wish I wouldn't apologize so much. *FEEL SO RESPONSIBLE.*

"Perhaps if I cleaned up the room you'd feel better," I say. "Perhaps if I slept on the floor next to the dog."

More room for Mrs. Hanson and the three kids. Mrs. Hanson slithering naked next to Rip. Mrs. Hanson breathing lullabies into Rip's dozing face.

By day I'm a person of importance. Thank heavens. With my fish body assembly work. Nearly fifty thousand so far and the numbers keep climbing. The parts from Hong Kong, duty free. That was my doing. I discovered the rule about location. Where it is permissible for a manufacturer to assemble a product on home turf, thus avoiding import tax. The rule book was old but not forgotten. I take pride in that. Ferreter of antique rules.

The woman at Customs agreed, but not wholeheartedly.

"Right here on page 15 of ENTRY REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTS FROM FOREIGN PARTS," I showed her.

She wasn't happy. They don't like to give anything away. They come to believe it's *their* rule you're tampering with.

"It's a nice rule," I told her, "one you should be proud of."

But she took it personally. That the Government would be missing

out on its due tax. That's dedication for you.

We all get on. Somehow. Me, I'm doing my part for the environment. Tax free. And I won't have to pay sales tax on the assembled fish bodies either because I won't be selling them. Because, in a sense, I'll be giving them away.

Rip was disappointed I didn't use my inheritance money for something more worthwhile. That's his opinion. A Jazz Trio, for example. I know he's always wanted one of those. Piano, bass, drums. Playing Bill Evans on demand. Actually, he'd like to have Bill Evans as well. I've often hoped he'd visit us in bed but the dead can be very stubborn. So far, no show.

A Bill Evans tape wouldn't do. I suggested it.

"Too small," said Rip.

He wants to be wrapped in the live thing, ear to the electric bass speaker or sit beside the piano player and stroke his fingers while he's playing. Or crouch beneath the piano player's legs and work the pedals. Involvement. That's what Rip wants.

But I only had enough inheritance money for one of us to be involved. And after all. It's important to me that I calm things down. Quit my job at the gas station just so I could take the time.

The fish bodies are all the same size. Ten inches. Just under the legal size limit. Plastic. Overall grey in colour, made up of three sections:

head, shaft, tail. Flecks of pink and blue in the plastic. Could be mistaken for a trout, a cod or a young salmon. That's not the important part, the type. It's just so that THEY CAN BE SEEN TO BE THERE.

I've always wanted to raise spirits.

Getting tired, though, with all these strangers turning up in our bed. I tell Rip about it but he just gets annoyed.

"Don't be so rigid," he says, "have a little flexibility. After all, they're not bothering you, are they? Not in any significant way? Beating you about the head or sitting on your back? Complaints about the bedroom furniture don't count. They're not actually hurting you, are they?"

Apart from Mrs. Hanson's gymnastics over Rip's body last night, I'd have to say, no, they're not.

"Well then," he says, "be like a rock in a stream, a tree in a storm. Let your turmoil flow around and away from you."

That's my Rip. He'd be a Zen Buddhist if he had the time. As it is, he's run off his feet. No wonder he sleeps through the night-time visitors. By day, he's selling Bic Pens, Eddy Matches. He's got the whole territory from here to Burgoyne Bay and having the whole of anything is exhausting. So there's always someone in *his* bed. IN A MANNER OF SPEAKING.

He's right, though. I make too big a deal about everything. Always

have. Still.

Seven members of the Golden Eagles Day Camp the night before last in our bed. Out on an adventure sleepover with their Counsellor.

Children are far too active, especially in sleep. Why I've never gone in for them. One of the campers tried to cuddle next to me, one even tried to climb in my arms. Rip just shoved them aside as if they were sleeping cats, heavy lumps. But me, I can't. I've always got to be taking charge. Half the night gone running back and forth to the fridge—juice for the campers. And then the nineteen-year-old Counsellor was having trouble with her boyfriend and wanted to talk. By morning I was a wreck from trying to keep everyone happy.

I can't leave well enough alone. Or in this case, bad enough alone. Doing my bit for the environmental movement. I can't stand it when people get upset. The depleting fish stocks. All the hue and cry.

My bit. Keeping the complainers happy. I have parts for one hundred and fifty thousand fish bodies. The boxes are stacked in the living room, hallway, kitchen, down the stairs to the basement. Thought of using Mini-Storage but the inheritance money is running low. If I were a midget, it would seem like a cardboard city inside our house. Towers of boxes, alley ways dark and spooky, no telling what goes on in there.

One of the campers got lost the other night on the way to the bath-

room. Found her wandering terrified among the tail sections.

I'm especially happy about those tail sections. After all those faxes to Mr. Ni in Hong Kong.

"They've got to look like they're swimming," I faxed. "They've got to look like they're MOVING IN SCHOOLS THROUGH THE WATER."

Mr. Ni is a marvel. Even without an engineer he managed to come up with a propeller thingy that's connected to an elastic band. And he guarantees it. Either my assembled fish bodies self-propel or he'll take them back. That's business. So far, on my bathtub trials, success. Except for an occasional turn of swimming on their backs, the fish performed quite well. You just pull this elastic band, the tails whirl and away they go.

I was trying to tell Mrs. Hanson about my plans last night in bed but she wasn't interested. Just wanted me to give the baby his bottle so she could get on with Rip's body rub.

The baby listened. "I will be delivering the first fifty thousand fish bodies to the ocean by month's end,"

I told him. "I'm so excited. Rip has agreed to drive the hired truck. A dump truck. My plan is to back down the ramp at Anchor's Aweigh Marina about three in the morning. Only problem is, first I have to activate the tail sections. Otherwise, plunk, to the bottom of the deep blue sea."

Fifty thousand elastic bands snapping. I have to admit it's daunting. I'd have a nightmare about it, no doubt, if my nights weren't already so crowded. That's something. Too bad the strangers are gone this morning. I'm at the point where I could do with some help.

Right now what I picture before me is a string of busy, solitary days activating fish bodies. Their writhing grey forms mounting the cardboard box towers, scraping against the ceiling. Jiggling jelly. Maggot movement.

What keeps me going is THE THOUGHT. All those upset people calmed down. Perhaps even happy. "LOOK, THERE'S FISH IN THE SEA!" Again. After all. In spite of. 🐟

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Penis Envy

by Lyle Weis

illustrated by Adrian Kleinbergen

Sunday began so well, church bells ringing in the distance and we two cuddled together in self-indulgence, soaking up the April sunlight that shone past the undrawn curtains. Just me and my penis.

Under the covers, my naked body woke to feel him against my thigh, not yet fully aroused, but with clear intentions. I rolled away a little. "Let me sleep," I murmured.

"Come on," Peter coaxed. His body, still soft and heavy, found the inside of my thigh again, moving with a seductive slowness. "Remember what the philosopher Kant said," he whispered, "'Breakfast, wash, shave, masturbate—that's the body taken care of for the day.'"

"Oh please," I grumbled. "Now I have to get up."

"Martin, you said you wanted to sleep! It's that damned woman, isn't it? Every time you meet someone new, you don't pay nearly as much attention to me."

The same old complaint. As long as nothing came between us, he was happy. We could spend hours, even days, in bed if I gave in to him, stopping



only when he became too raw, or I felt faint from hunger. Some days I wished we could take separate vacations.

"I simply have to take a leak. Come on."

I threw the covers back and got out of bed. Peter, I noticed, lost most of his interest on the way. He pouted as we stepped from the hall into the bathroom, hanging his head and flopping back and forth.

I stood at the toilet, waiting. Of course, now he held back out of spite. "Get with it," I urged, "my bladder's bursting. Probably explains why you're so puffed up with yourself this morning."

"Oh sure, blame it on the water." He released a wounded sigh and, with it, a jet of warm yellow fluid. The last few drops hit the bowl and I gave him a squeeze for good measure. Then, as a friendly gesture, another.

"Forget it, Martin, you had your chance." If he'd had any shoulders, he would have shrugged. When I released him, he hung limply without speaking, like a newborn puppy, fat and soft.

I turned to the sink and washed my face and hands. A brisk rub with the towel, and I paused to examine myself in the mirror.

This roused Peter once again, but in a different way. "Pathetic," he scolded. "Look at yourself, circles under your eyes. You're a wreck, staying up so late. And for what? She

didn't even invite you in, for pete's sake. After almost a month!"

I began to interrupt, but he was determined. He wagged his head disapprovingly.

"You've always been so sensible with women, Martin—no entanglements, no commitments. Sure, we both have our needs, but do we really need a woman? We have each other."

The last thing I wanted was an argument with an insecure penis. "Leave me alone," I pleaded.

He laughed sarcastically. "Oh, sure. May as well: you're letting everything else go to pieces." His tone had a mean edge to it. "You look as bad as this place. The bathroom, for instance! Awful. Paint's peeling, lino needs replacing, and that mirror is ready to fall off the wall."

I reached out, touched the mirror. Normally, two bottom brackets held the weight of the sheet mirror up, but several weeks earlier one had fallen out. At my touch, the glass wobbled. Quickly, I withdrew my finger. If left alone, it would be fine. He was right about the walls, though. Paint peeled in sheets from the ceiling near the shower.

"As soon as I finish the revisions on this book, I'll spend two weeks redecorating and doing repairs. The bathroom's first."

"Yeah, sure."

I returned to the bedroom, dove under the covers. As I wrapped my hand around him, Peter said,

"What's up? I thought you were heading for the computer."

"No hurry. First things first." With my other hand, I carefully squeezed my scrotum, while pulling slowly down with my clenched hand.

"Ah, oh, careful there." He flushed and his muscles gathered mass. He grew considerably.

"Guess it wasn't just the water."

"Mmm. No."

I rolled to my side. Outside, a birch tree caught a breath of wind, its leaves fluttering. Slow and easy. Come up on it slowly.

"Martin?"

"Um?"

"That woman, Rhonda. You're behaving oddly with her. Are—are you falling in love?"

"Could be. She's different. I feel very good around her. Yes, I could be in love."

Peter struggled to shake his head in my hand. "More likely you're in lust. I think I know a little about that," he said proudly. Then, with sadness, he added, "I'll never know what love feels like."

I had to laugh. "Peter, I think you're jealous. Don't worry, no matter what happens, there'll always be time for us alone. We're inseparable."

"Well, I don't," Peter began to argue. Then, he gasped. "Oh, take it easy. Um, yes. Where was I? Oh yes, women. They're so possessive, so eager to restrict a man's movements, so ah, . . . oh, yes, that's it, faster!"

Say what you will, communing with the self is a necessary part of life, causing neither blindness nor hairy palms. Yet Kant did not know everything: the dreaming mind will not be still while the body takes its fill.

Long, lovely moments later, we lay together, sweaty and bathed in our own moisture. Once the tide of my breathing had settled down, I swung my legs over the edge of the bed.

"Time for a shower."

Peter did not answer and as I stood a drop of liquid fell from him, hitting my foot. Now that I think about it, the drop was probably a tear.

In the neglected surroundings of the bathroom, I switched on the heat lamp and the exhaust fan. I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror, a middle-aged man with a couple of gray pubic hairs and a soft belly. Below, Peter drooped in sullen darkness. Next weekend, I told myself, I start jogging, and paint these ugly walls. And maybe replace that bracket for the mirror.

I adjusted the temperature on the shower and stepped in. Peter seemed to throb slightly, as if tender. I gave him a pat, which he ignored. Water coursed over our bodies, and I rubbed soap over my stomach and down my crotch.

"You're dishonest." Peter's words, though nearly drowned out by the water, were clear enough to

surprise me.

"What? How do you mean?"

He sniffed. "You were thinking about her back there in bed. Your eyes had that look, faraway."

"They always look that way when I'm teetering on the orgasmic edge. The little death, and all that. You're imagining things." I resented having to justify myself . . . or did I feel caught? I rinsed, and turned off the water with a rough wrenching movement.

"My, a bit testy, aren't we?" Peter sputtered as I squeezed excess water down my chest and over him. "Go ahead, get rid of the guilt. Take it out on me!"

I paused, hand on the shower door. This was too much. Like most of his kind, Peter was obsessively curious about his female other, and pushy about his needs. His words irritated me.

"Yes, yes, I admit it," I shouted. "I dreamed of Rhonda while you and I were doing it. She's beautiful, and not at all selfish. Not like you, always raising your ugly bald head at the slightest provocation, always at me for another shot between the sheets. Damn, would you give it a rest?"

I had pushed the shower door open and was stepping through, when Peter cried out in fury. His

throbbing, which had swelled him to unnnatural size as I spoke, suddenly raged. In a heartbeat's moment, I experienced the fastest, largest and most painful erection of my life.

"Owww!!!" I clutched myself and stumbled out of the shower, ramming my gigantic friend against the opposite wall under the mirror.

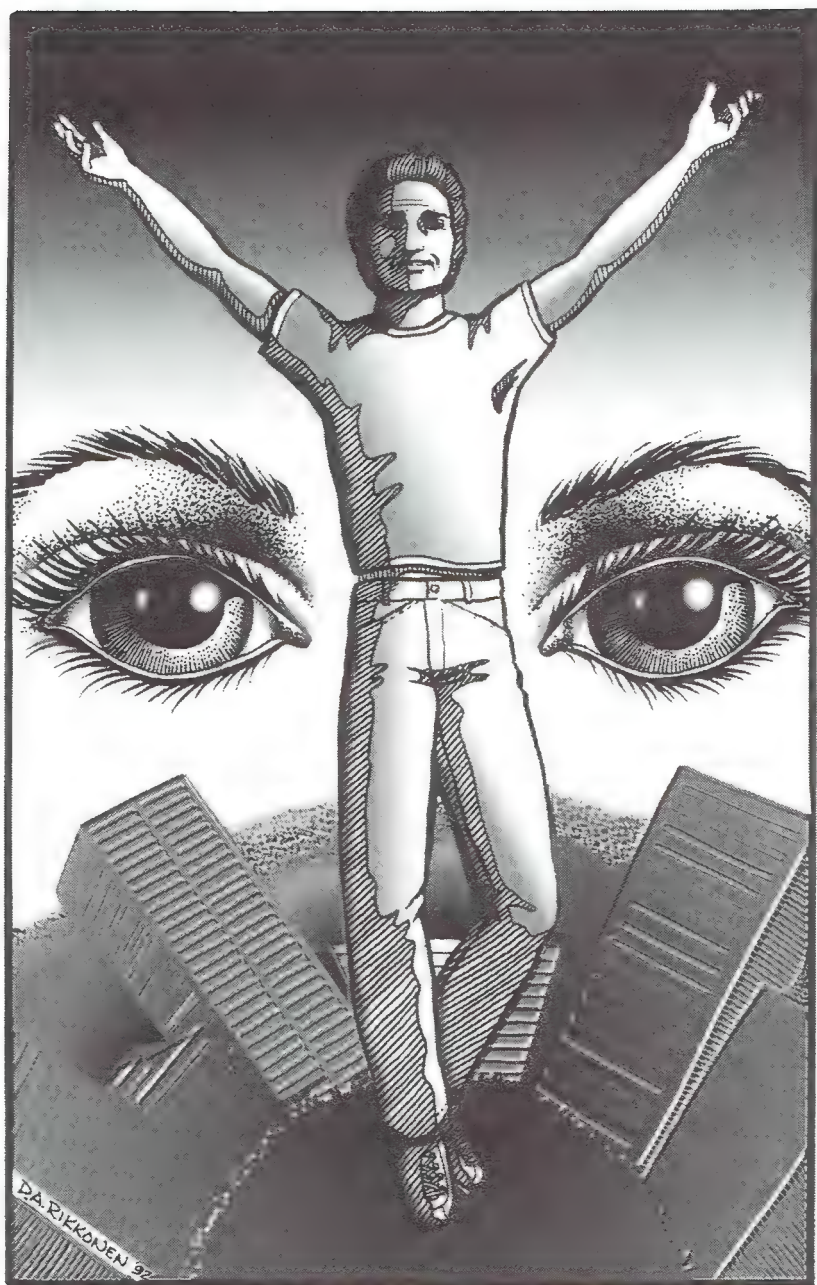
The sudden pain caused me to shriek so loudly, I discovered later, that the neighbor lady next door phoned the police and an ambulance. A good thing, too, since Peter and I hit the wall with such an impact that the mirror jarred loose and crashed down upon us in a shower of glass.

*

Oh, you might say we patched things up after that, but we've never really been the same. Peter has apologized, but finds it difficult to hold his head up these days. "It's all my fault," he says, and I won't argue the fact with him.

He accepts Rhonda though, and the three of us answer each other's needs. She handles him gently, coaxing and purring how much like a tatoo his scar appears to be. And Peter, in his patched vanity, hears in her words something more than flattery.

He believes she's got him right where she needs him. ♡×××



Falling

by Robert Boyczuk

illustrated by Dory A. Rikkonen

1. A good clean fall is what Adrian hoped for.
One step out from the ledge, a quick plummet and—
No fuss, no muss.
At least none for him.

2.

Disconcerted, Adrian hangs above the crowd, stuck between earth and sky, his progress arrested ten stories too soon. He cannot move, or even blink, only float before curious eyes like a half-formed thought. At first, he finds his suicide a source of profound embarrassment; later he comes to regard it as simply another banal fact of his life.

3.

Adrian soon realizes that, no, he is not exactly suspended. Careful observation shows that he is indeed falling: objects at the top of his field of vision have inched upwards and out of sight while new ones have slowly crept in at the bottom. Certainly he is falling, not quickly, perhaps as little as a centimetre every hour, but falling all the same. Moreover, he notes that the tableau below grows slightly smaller with each passing day, the scope of his vision narrowing as he approaches his death.

4.

Adrian is neither comfortable nor uncomfortable.

He simply *is*.

He can, if he strains, make out the blurred contour of what he believes to be his right arm. Further away, somewhat more in focus, is the tip of his right foot, still covered with its frayed work sock. Many stories below lies the familiar corner of Market Street and East Avenue, the gathering crowd pressed against police cordons. It is as if he is looking through a circular plate of glass whose focal point is at the centre, and whose image becomes increasingly distorted towards the edges like a funhouse mirror.

Physical sensation has vanished. He feels neither heartbeat nor breath, senses no breeze stirring on his skin even when he can see litter scudding

energetically across the street below, has no bodily aches or pains, not even the familiar ones to which he's grown accustomed.

As for the other aches, he knows these too will disappear in the course of time.

5.

Falling is not a particularly bad thing, he thinks in these early days. It gives one time to reflect.

For instance: he hadn't found her especially beautiful. Her mother was native Indian and her father Asian, giving her skin an curious hue that he had never seen before. Her nose was too large for her face, her teeth crooked and slightly yellow. But it was the way she had cut her hair, raggedly short, the stubble dyed an alarming red, that had caught his eye with its improbability. "Take me home," she had whispered that first evening, unexpectedly, startling and exciting him at the same time. They had only known each other three hours, he reluctantly attending a client's dinner party, she a friend of a friend.

6.

For a span of days after his leap he recalls events clearly: first the commotion, the sidewalk and street crowded with onlookers, curiosity seekers, officials. To the side were parked several vehicles—a fire truck, an ambulance, three police cars—

lights flashing, doors ajar, serious men leaning on the roofs of their vehicles and speaking quietly amongst themselves with an occasional nod in his direction.

Not long after came the media.

They arrived all at once, surging like angry insects, hauling cameras and recorders, dragging dishes and antennas, scrambling over one another, pushing and shoving, some even ludicrously shouting questions as if they thought Adrian might answer, though he can no more speak than he can stop his descent.

What, he wonders often, can they find so compelling in one man's death?

1.

She was, he believes, somewhat vain, though this he can easily forgive her. She would sit for hours before the gilt framed mirror in his bathroom, naked and beautiful against white tile, snipping meticulously at the tiny hairs that had become too long, or those that seemed to have grown into too regular a pattern, as if she viewed any kind of uniformity with the same kind of embarrassment he felt in an ill-fitting suit.

Afterwards, he would sweep the floor, filling the dust pan with those small, bright red strands of hair, sometimes rolling them between his thumb and forefinger before letting them drop into the garbage.

8.

All rescue attempts fail.

Nets cannot hold him: both fibre and metal twines stretch then tear, snapping violently back when the last strands finally part under his inescapable weight. Platforms are anchored with thick bolts to the side of his apartment building to cradle him, but these too splinter and tumble to the ground taking with them part of the dirty yellow brickwork of the wall. And once, as if they had forgotten previous attempts, spiderwork scaffolding is erected till its rough boards almost touch his buttocks, but this too he pushes through, his creeping momentum bending and twisting the thin metal tubes supporting the platform until the whole structure suddenly explodes outwards and showers the terrified crowd, injuring several.

He feels a stab of anger at their stupidity, and wonders why no one has thought to ask him if he wants to be saved, why no one has even tried to question him about his wishes.

But the anger passes, and what follows is an overwhelming guilt at the suffering others endure at his expense.

9.

Adrian's apartment is nearly bare.

Over the years he has reduced those objects surrounding him until

he has only the essentials he needs for a day-to-day existence. His living room is spartan, holding a few necessary furnishings: a drafting table he purchased at an art supplies store and on which his computer sits, an office swivel chair he discovered at a yard sale, his mother's small worn leather couch and battered end table, a large-screen TV with remote control.

His bedroom contains a bed, a dresser, and a small night table with an old lamp he has kept from his childhood. The fridge and cupboards in his kitchen are nearly bare.

There are no pictures or decorations of any sort on the walls, with the exception of an old photograph of his father—a thin, sombre looking man wearing a dark suit—that sits in a wooden frame atop his fridge.

10.

There are periods Adrian cannot remember clearly, and he believes during these times his mind *sleeps*, as it did in that other life, for the various states accompanying sleep remain. One difference, however, is that he remembers wisps of dreams, half-formed visions, although until now he has retained almost none since childhood. He dreams outlines of hard, unforgiving geometric patterns, squares and triangles, cubes and blocks against a brilliant white background that leave burning after-

images when he returns to consciousness.

For some reason this makes him sad.

11.

Adrian, We Understand, reads one sign. *Hang in there, Adrian*, says another. *Don't Do it!* implores a third absurdly, as if he had not already made his decision.

He reads these signs with detachment, knowing that most who watch him do not share these sentiments. He senses their distaste for the melodramatic, can imagine their resentment of what they see as his huge conceit. But this is not all. He also believes he can see the longing in their eyes, watching hungrily and imagining their own varied ends, feeling frustration at this upsetting of the proper order of things. Sometimes he believes it is they who hold him here, that it is their appetite that denies him his peace. In his death they see all the small deaths they die each day, a metaphor, he thinks, for their own gradual disintegrations.

But he discards this notion as too obvious.

12.

Adrian has lived in this neighbourhood all his life, although its character has taken a turn for the worse in the last few years. Why he has remained he cannot say. He recalls long summer days spent play-

ing in the streets, his parents watching from the stoop of the red-brick rowhouse on East Avenue. His family had lived three houses from the corner until his father failed to come home one night in August. Adrian remembers that night for its particular humidity and the movement of his mother, who hummed and sweated and cooked porridge as if nothing in the world were more important. The following week he and his mother moved in with his aunt's family twelve doors down the street.

Sometimes Adrian wonders what might have happened to his father, wonders if he is still alive, wonders if he sees his son suspended on the screen of his television on the six o'clock news.

13.

And sometimes, when he is not careful, he catches himself wondering where she is now.

14.

A memory:

It is late, and Adrian stares at the screen, having just finished his final contractual obligation. Adrian does not work in an office, at least not the same one every day. He is a freelance programmer, his specialty the C programming language. Often he works from his small, one-bedroom apartment. In this he considers himself lucky. Though his work does not afford him the secu-

rity he would like, he tells acquaintances that he enjoys the variety of jobs it brings him. With his career, as with all other things, he is careful and cautious, fearful of the consequences of ill-considered actions.

He leans back in his chair and rubs his eyes.

For the last three months he has taken on no new clients, leaving behind in each company's files the small discreet business cards of competitors whose work he feels is reliable. His decision is not a rash one. Adrian is not a rash man.

Before her, he had lost himself in the thrum of his work, the long hours of code that strolled out on the screen before him like elegant flamingoes.

When she left, she took even this.

Perhaps, he thinks, she was only an excuse, a last chance, realizing the process of his isolation had begun long before he met her.

He pushes himself out of his swivel chair and walks into the kitchen where he leans against the fridge. Looking at the dusty picture of his father, he thinks of her.

15.

Adrian considers falling. He counts off mentally the meanings and phrases of falling in his life: to fall asleep, to have a falling out, falling through the cracks, deals falling through, falling flat on his face, fall-

ing into line, falling all over himself, to fall short of his goals, to fall out a window, to fall in love, to fall from grace, the fall of man.

16.

Exactly what attracted him Adrian could not say.

Her temperament was contradictory and difficult, her emotional swings wild and unpredictable. She dressed and acted aggressively and with confidence, yet in private moments betrayed to him fears of weakness and self-doubt; her anger rose suddenly and without warning, but passed quickly, leaving a tenderness and compassion so complete Adrian feared that he might weep; she was moved by beggars on the street and almost always stopped to give them money, but would fly into a rage when appeals were made on TV. It was as if only in this tension of opposites she found her momentum.

To Adrian her behaviour was nerve-racking.

But then he remembers a family wedding when, for a time, she seemed at peace, free of these constantly warring complexities. She was transformed, a serenity he had not seen before settling on her features, and she became almost beautiful. Adrian watched this metamorphosis with amazement, as she moved from cousin to uncle in light, carefree steps; then, later, as she whirled past him on the dance floor in the arms

of her father, bestowing a warm smile on him that made his heart skip a beat. He smiled back, but it was too late, for she had already turned.

And at that moment he thought that, should he ever be capable of loving someone, it might be her.

17.

The crowd, Adrian notes, has taken to wearing long overcoats, hats and scarves. Dead leaves skitter through the streets.

How long has he been falling, Adrian wonders. Days? Weeks? Years? Forever? Or no time at all?

Although he knows this should bother him, it does not, for he now recognizes that his fall is a gift, his momentum a revelation, his leap one of faith. This prolonged tumble has presented him with an opportunity few are given: a chance to rewrite his story.

Adrian rejoices in falling.

18.

When he thinks of her it is her eyes he thinks of first: big, brown and luminous, impassioned, lively eyes. He recognizes that this is only a fancy, knowing eyes cannot express emotion, that they are anything but expressive, changing little from the time of birth. Why then, he wonders, did his chest constrict each time he looked directly into hers, or now, when he merely recalls them? Why did he talk to her so often with his

eyes averted, lest she see how foolish and irrevocable his own belief had become?

She was erratic, an enigma, unknowable, and perhaps this is what, in part, attracted him. Each time she left he had no way of knowing if she would return.

"I love you," he had once ventured at her moment of departure, quietly, uncertain, not sure she had even heard. She paused, one hand on the door, then turned and walked back to where he sat on the end of his old couch.

"Almost forgot," she said as he watched her long narrow fingers snatch sunglasses from the end table before she walked out the door.

19.

Though still caught in his fall, Adrian tries to imagine possible futures with her, considering them living together in his little apartment. But each scene he envisages does not work, suffering from some subtle dissonance which will not allow him to enjoy the moment. He can't help wondering, for instance, what she would do as he works at his computer. Certainly she can't stay in the room, for then he'd never accomplish anything, her presence a distraction too great for him to bear. Would she sit quietly on the edge of the bed until he is finished? Perhaps she could busy herself about the kitchen preparing his meals? Or

would she leave without saying a word to him, returning to the cafes and bars and clubs where she keeps friends?

So he makes up a larger apartment for them, and safer friends for her, and though she looks and sounds the same, she also changes in these visions, becomes more understanding, less demanding, unpredictable and vulnerable enough to excite his curiosity without making him overly-anxious. At these times he is convinced she waits for him below, amongst the crowd, where she keeps her vigil night and day, waiting patiently for the end of his descent.

20.

It had happened again.

"Shit," she said, in that small, angry voice, shaking her head. She said it as if she was not even talking to him, as if he were not even there in bed next to her.

Adrian followed her stare down to where her hand rested uselessly between his thighs, where she had for the last half hour tried without success to revive his ardour.

"Sorry," was all he could think to say.

"Why can't you just relax? Huh? There's just no in between for you, is there? Christ, you're either too fast or not at all. I don't know how much longer I can take this."

"Sorry," he said again, listening to the sound of the word, wonder-

ing if perhaps there was not some small part of him that willed it to happen this way, that wanted to push things to their limit, to see how far they could be stretched before they broke.

21.

It is night, and a solitary figure stands below in the circle of lamp-light. Snow continues to fall, and Adrian watches as the man's breath slips out in small white clouds, the only sign that he is alive.

Adrian feels alone, as if he has been abandoned.

In some future history, Adrian thinks, I will be forgotten, the text will disappear, the historical notes vanish, a loose page torn from the book to fall, unnoticed, to the floor; and this thought, more than anything else, frightens him.

22.

Real memories have become increasingly elusive. Many are now only vague afterthoughts, a feeling that something once happened, that something was once important, but now has no meaning. Thus diminished, Adrian feels them slip away like the strings of helium filled balloons from between his fingers. But no matter how much of his life has eroded in this manner he cannot free himself from the one image he would if it were in his power: the contempt

that twists her features as she speaks.

"You have no feelings." Her words are clipped and cruelly direct. "You pretend you feel, but there is nothing there. Only self-interest. Sometimes I'm not sure there is even that. You're so lost in yourself you can't even see how desperately lonely you are."

Adrian ventures nothing this time, not even his usual denials.

"There's no room in your universe for anyone else. We are all creations that live and die as we enter and leave your sight. So I'll make it easy for you, and leave."

Adrian sits alone in his apartment.

Did she really say all that?

Could she have said all that?

But she was wrong, had misinterpreted. He did feel, but could not express it. He couldn't do otherwise. It wasn't in the nature of the character he had created for himself.

23.

Alone, Adrian hangs far above the street, caught between endless planes of earth and sky, bit-by-bit becoming aware of a small thought that worries away at the edge of his resolve.

He wonders, did she ever exist?

But yes, he must believe, has to believe, for that is all that carries him towards a final resolution.

He knows the weight of her will bear him down like a stone.

If only he can believe. ■

Ask Mr. Science compiled by Al Betz

Ms. C.J. of Edmonton, AB:

What are time zones?

A: Time zones are very much like speed zones, except that they control the rate at which one lives his/her life, instead of the speed at which he/she travels. You, dear writer, are required by law to live your life, in the Mountain Standard Time Zone, at a rate of 1.00 seconds per second. Mr. Science, in the Pacific Standard Time Zone, must live his life at 1.23 seconds per second, which accounts for the rather large amount of research he can perform in a short time. The Prime Minister and his cohorts must live their lives, in the Eastern Standard Time Zone, at 0.80 seconds per second. The consequences of this value are painfully obvious to the rest of us. If one should attempt to live at a ratio different from that established by law for his/her time zone, he/she is subject to arrest. The penalties are very severe.

Mr. P.H. of Mississauga, ON:

Can you print more pages in *ON SPEC* if you switch to cheaper paper?

A: Mr. Science writes for the ages. His contract requires that only high quality paper which will last for at least 150 years without yellowing or acid release may be used. For comparison, examine the April 1926 issue of *Amazing Stories*, which you undoubtedly have in your collection. As you turn a page, after only 47 years, pieces of the edge will crumble to dust. Mr. Science simply cannot allow his wisdom to be lost to humanity in this manner.

Ms. F.S. of Burnaby B.C.:

What is electricity?

A: Beginning students of electricity are taught an analogy between the flow of electricity through a wire and the flow of water through a pipe. This is closer to the truth than most scientists believe. There is a great deal of empty space between the atoms of a metal, and it is through this empty space that the electric fluid flows. A non-conductor does not conduct the electric fluid because there is far less empty space available between its atoms or molecules. The function of the rubber or plastic insulation on a wire, incidentally, is simply to keep the electric fluid from leaking out of the sides of the wire, thereby making slippery puddles on the floor. **C**



GODEATERS

by Jason Kapalka
illustrated by Robert Boerboom

"That's a Christ-ugly piece of work, that."

"Hey, show some respect, Parker. That's indigenous art, right? Some kind of bone sculpture. They flew it in this morning."

"Still fucking ugly. Looks like it tried to eat an elephant and died of indigestion. I mean, what's it supposed to *be*?"

"There's a plaque over there. Says it's a—kinda hard to pronounce—"

"Yeah, well, it's all ooga mcbooga to me. Leave that stuff to the anthro team."

"Remember, Parker, they're a highly developed civilized people who just happened to be isolated from Western influences for a long time."

"Yeah, I remember. I wrote that part. I still think they're a bunch of stone-age jungle bunnies."

"You want to write that into the press release?"

"Shit, no."

Artifact #243. The artifact is approximately 105 cm tall, and 95 cm by 56 cm at the base, weighing 37.3 kg. In general outline it is a humanoid figure sitting cross-legged. Its age is at present unknown. The bones that make up the figure are from several species: specimens have been identified from varieties of rodents and large felines, as well as the obvious human femurs and skull. Several bone specimens remain to be classified, and do not seem to belong to indigenous phyla.

"No, we did not 'buy out' their country, as you put it. As you know, we simply have a fifty-year contract for various mineral and lumber resources there, with an open trade agreement on other goods and services.

"Yes, certainly they are happy with the terms of the agreement. There are already teams of experts in country helping them develop more advanced agricultural and harvesting technologies, and soon we hope to have telecommunication centres established in most of their settlements.

"I'm afraid I can't discuss the exact terms of the agreement.

"It's a matter between their leaders and our company policymakers, a business transaction like any other.

"You can ask them if they're happy with the arrangement. We've flown in several of their leaders who

you can speak to via translators in a few minutes.

"Yes, but this is a business transaction, not an anthropological study. Of course their way of life will be changed, but for the better. As I mentioned, there are experts working there now on modernizing their medical system, among other things.

"Those are examples of native artwork that we've brought back, yes. That is a bone sculpture, a form of art unique to their country. As you can see by the craftsmanship, they are a highly developed civilized people who simply happened to be isolated from Western influences for an unusually long time.

"I have no further information on that at this time.

"Thank you. We'll have further releases for you in a few days."

The manner of the artifact's construction remains largely conjecture. The longer leg and arm bones have been fitted with grooves and slots to accommodate smaller bones from rodent species, accounting for the unusual protruding spikes. The figure's torso is a curiosity as well: though the figure as a whole is recognizably humanoid, the skeletal torso seems perversely to represent a grotesquely enlarged stomach. As can be seen, the ribcage has been extended downwards seven sets; however, the ribs are obviously too large

to be of human origin. No positive identification has been made at this date.

"Well, Parker, the media's screaming, as usual."

"Ah, it's all legal. Nothing that hasn't been done before. Besides, they've got nothing better to do with the land in that country."

"Yeah. I—"

"What?"

"Nothing."

"Damn, I wish they'd shut that goddamn muzak off. Driving me crazy. What is that? Doesn't sound like the usual crap."

"It's stuff from in country. Well, it's based on native stuff. They cleaned it up some."

"Sounds like cats eating each other. Jesus."

"Well, they're trying to give the impression of cultural exchange, you know. They're moving some of the sculptures into the building too."

"That's all I need, to have one of those skeleton things sitting on my fucking desk. Jesus."

"Well, you know, they're a highly developed civilized people—"

"Yeah, okay already."

The artifact has been treated with various compounds to retard aging; this accounts for the polished brown texture. In some cases the combination of chemical reactions and very fine sanding has produced a fused sur-

face that renders identification of bone types difficult. The figure's head, for example, is obviously a human skull, but the crownlike projections, apparently grafted from a different portion of the skeleton or from another species altogether, merge so closely that no differentiation is detectable.

"Parker."

"Yeah."

"There's another press conference scheduled for tomorrow. They want us to work up some info on the mining ops. I figure we'd better get going on that, you know how the press loves to blow this sort of thing up—"

"Hey, what is that fucking thing you're wearing?"

"Oh, uh, this? It's kinda this medallion or necklace thing, I forget what exactly they call it . . ."

"It's from the site exchange?"

"Well, no . . . it's not actually from in country. Reproduction. I think they're trying to push the cultural bit, these are starting to pick up a lot of approval in the mass market. The music, too. There's a lot of artists re-recording things now, you know, updating it, giving it some decent production values."

"Yeah, so why are you wearing the thing? Those are little plastic bones, for Christ's sake."

"Well, shit, Parker, haven't you been reading the memos? Company

reps are supposed to present an open, multicultural front . . .”

“I don’t have to cover *my* ass . . . sonofabitch, look at that. They put that big-bellied skeleton thing in the goddamn lounge.”

“If you can’t appreciate its artistic merits, maybe you should just think of it as very valuable company property.”

“Ain’t worth the beads and whiskey it cost, you ask me. What’s it called again?”

“A God Eater.”

The central stomach cavity of the artifact has been the subject of conflicting opinions in the anthropological study team. Its large size suggests to some that at one point it served as a vessel for something, perhaps sacrifices. Others point out that the ribcage does not permit easy access to the central cavity. Native artisans have been of little help in resolving this quandary, refusing to speak extensively of the artifact for presumably religious reasons.

“So where’s the god it ate? That gut looks pretty empty to me.”

“I dunno, Parker. Maybe it got shat out.”

“Hmm. You figure maybe I’ll get shat out if I don’t start wearing hokey plastic jungle necklaces?”

“Aw, it’s not like that, you know that. It’s just the fashion right now.

Look at the secretary when you go out, she’s got these earring kind of things, they’re reproductions too. It’s just the style right now, modern primitive, you know? It’s fashionable. Like how your suit was four years ago.”

“Fuck you.”

“Geez, just look at your TV! Everyone’s doing it. Real primitive culture is in. All the Greenpeace environmentalist types are backing it in a big way. It makes the company look good.”

“Yeah, maybe so. Press isn’t screaming imperialist enviro-rape anymore.”

“See, you get it.”

“Huh. Maybe. But that jerkass string of fake bones still doesn’t do shit for me.”

The origins and purpose of the artifact are undetermined at this date. Native representatives gave conflicting explanations of its significance. The most likely function is a religious one, yet the artifact does not correspond to any known figure in their pantheon. Furthermore, as they have allowed no other religious icons to be transported to North America at this date, its role in native theology is doubly doubtful. Still, its position in various shamanistic ceremonies leaves little doubt of its importance in spiritual affairs. Though it is not regarded as a god, appar-

ently it is not a demonic figure either; it appears to occupy a singular and anomalous position in the native theology.

"Is the heating on the fritz? God, it's hot in here."

"You really don't know? You've got to get with the agenda, Parker."

"What are you talking about?"

"The plants. They need a hot, moist climate."

"You mean that jungle in reception? They turned up the heat so some fucking trees would be comfortable?"

"They want to go for a more organic look in the building. More transcultural stuff, you know. Some human rights organizations are getting antsy about the work set-ups down there."

"Are you kidding me? I'm supposed to sweat like a pig all day so they can have some native plants on display?"

"Maybe you should get one of these robe things. They're a lot cooler. Reproductions, but..."

"They don't even live in the jungle, for Christ's sake! Why would they? Besides, those are goddamn palm trees, they aren't indigenous to their country, or ours. Who do they think they're fooling?"

"It's the general impression that matters. Really, you should try one of these robes. I mean, not to pander or anything, it's just some people think you're a little out of touch

with company policy on dress these days."

"For fucking out loud. You're standing there in a puke-coloured polyester nightgown telling me I'm out of touch?"

The native word used for the artifact translates roughly as "Eater of Gods." There is some ambiguity here, however; the term for 'god' is apparently applicable to a variety of concepts, and is not necessarily regarded as a singular entity. A better translation might be simply "force" or "power."

"Jesus wept."

"Parker, it's not real. Cosmetic. Clip-on, sort of."

"You're wearing a cosmetic clip-on bone sliver through your nose?"

"Parker, it's called—"

"No, don't tell me. Yeah, I know, everybody's got one. The building's like a goddamn greenhouse and that fake bongo music shit is driving me up the wall, and I don't care what you or anyone else says, I'm not wearing one of those nightgown things. This is fucking ridiculous."

"Parker, I think maybe you've got a closed-mind attitude."

"Yeah? I think maybe I'm just not a sycophantic asshole like you."

"Ngai'vo!"

"Hmm, what's that? Is that the, whatchamacallit, anglicized version of

their language they're having you guys study now? Damn, and I forgot to do my homework."

"Let me translate then. It means you're a dinosaur, Parker. It means your neck is on the block, okay? I'm not kidding. It means you either get in touch with modern developments or you'll be just another evolutionary fuckup for the anthro boys to pick at a hundred years from now. It's *your* choice, pal."

"Sure it is."

"Yeah, go ahead, Parker, walk away. Who do you think you're kidding? You know what side your bread is buttered on. You're not that stupid."

"No?"

"No."

Parker left. Once he was out of the building, he stopped smiling.

Q. How then do the people react to the wave of new technology and culture flooding into their country?

A. They're quite happy about it, actually. They've embraced the new techniques we've brought in wholeheartedly.

Q. Surely so many changes—to their technology, their economy, their very way of life—must have had a traumatic effect on their religion.

A. No, not really. They're not scared or shy of our culture at all. They've been able to fit television, radio, comput-

ers and the like into their belief system with no problem.

Q. How do they regard these new concepts?

A. As gods.

Q. Gods?

A. Yes. But they're used to new gods. They know how to deal with them.

Parker drove in to work from the suburbs. On his way into the building he passed a huddle of youths camped out on the sidewalk, under the shade of the new trees city council had planted. They were cooking a dog over a small pot fire. He hurried past.

Inside he fought his way past the foliage choking the reception area by listening for the digitized chants pumping out of the offices. He adjusted his kaftan and went into the conference room. He hoped he wouldn't have to do much talking; his teeth still hurt from being filed the other day.

"*Mauqui fa* Parker!" barked the Chieftain Executive Officer. Parker knelt and abased himself for his lateness, then took his place on the grass mat. The rest of the company reps, resplendent in their kaftans, hair bound back into tight *afais*, looked at him incuriously. Parker thought that their melanin treatments hadn't taken very well: they were all patchy in places. He noticed too that the God Eater had been moved into the

room. It sat in a glass display case behind the CEO's throne.

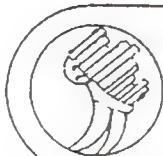
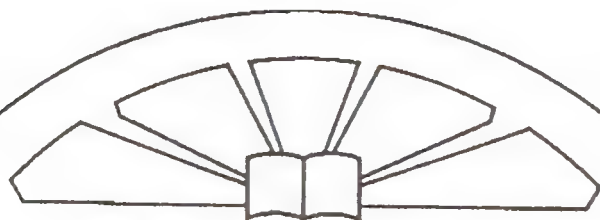
"*Fashta ki*, Parker?" the sales director asked.

"*Fashta noqui*," he agreed curtly. His teeth hurt too much for small talk.

The Chieftain pounded a bone on his authority drum and called the meeting to order with an ululating shriek. Parker found his mind wandering during the first chant; he was still having trouble with even the anglicized grammar given in the language primer. Once he was thinking

in the new language, he was sure everything else would come naturally.

At the back of the room the God Eater sat, looking down on them with its glossy frozen grin. As the company reps beat their drums and howled in unison and the Chieftain slashed open a drugged chicken to lap up the blood, Parker could see them and himself reflected in the glass of the display case. It looked as though they were all inside the case. It looked, in fact, as if they were all inside the bulge of the skeletal belly.



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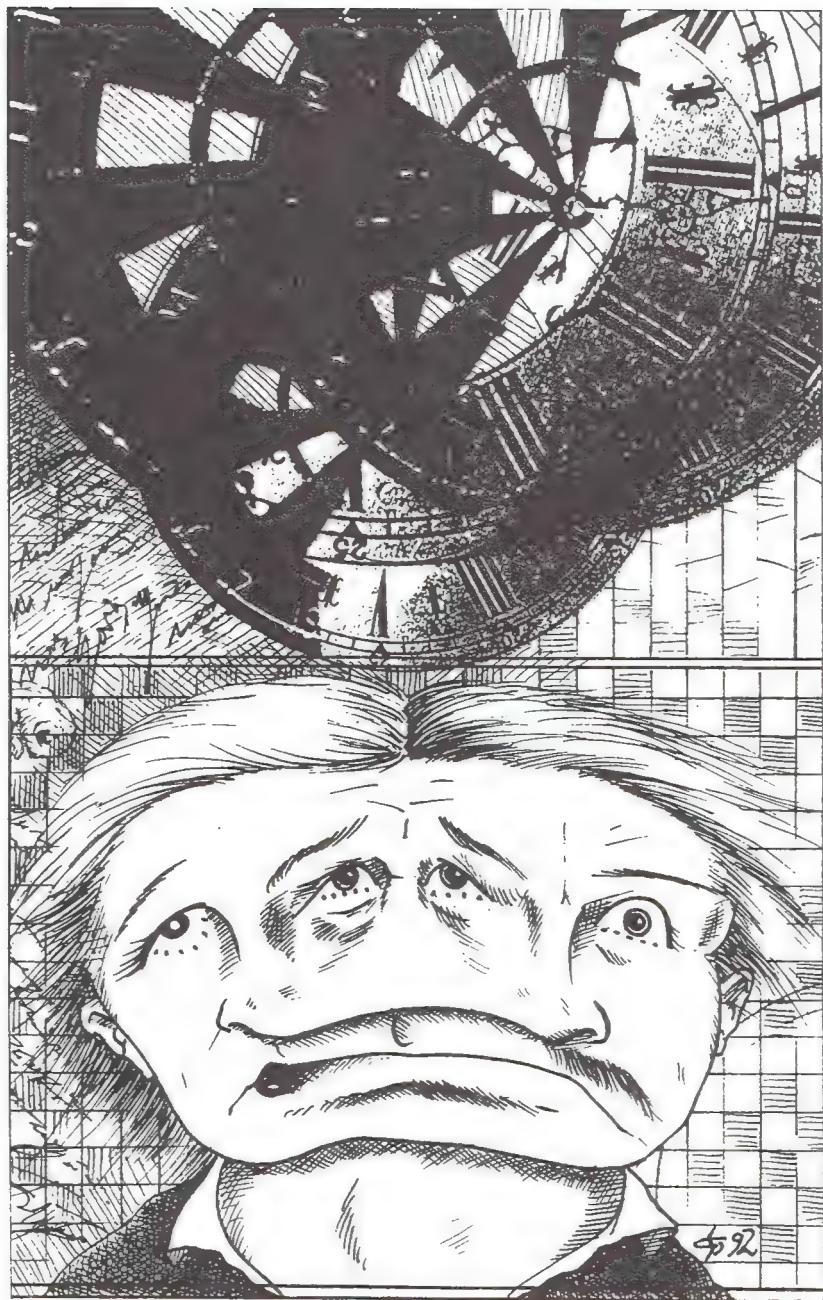
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Anna's Last Letter,

by Count Leo Nickolayevich Tolstoy,
as Dreamed

by John Skaife
illustrated by Steve Goetze

My name—George Barons.

His name—Symington Mills. The devil. Not sure.

No, I can't go on without using some verb tense or another. Perhaps I should use the future tense, since the scenes I will describe have not happened yet. But I can't stand pages filled with will-walks and will-speaks, and I believe my hypothetical reader can't, either. I'll tell it in the past tense, *my* past tense. But forgive me my occasional lapse into future or present, for I sit here with a past that hasn't happened yet and a future I've already lived.

Ah, the Holden Caulfield crap—really, my childhood and adolescence is unimportant, and I don't have time to spare. My life was as dull as a Kafka bureaucrat. Except for attempts to form bonds with women, I remained unattached. In March 1991, I began frequenting a bar that held dart tournaments, and I started practising. By September, I was on a league. That's how I met Symington Mills. He was on my darts team.

He moved like a charmed snake, or like the twister in *The Wizard of Oz*, his body, all 175 pounds of it, gyrating and undulating. He was perhaps thirty-eight or so, about a dozen years older than me. Serpents of grey crawled

through his brown hair, matching the colour of his eyes. He would tell me nothing of himself, but I guessed that he hid a perversion. His terse agreeability masked a superior contempt. As with the kind, Symington was highly intelligent, so I would talk about books with him, mining his deep knowledge which I envied and coveted.

On our fifth night together I made a pun on the title of a book by the reclusive novelist Stephen Corsica, a favourite author of mine whose books (all three of them) I'd read several times. Symington mentioned a book called *Shifting Contingencies* which he insisted was also by Stephen Corsica. *Shifting Contingencies* was never mentioned in the critical works, never noted in the bibliographies, hence I believed Symington to be confused about it. So he promised to bring the book with him the following week.

A week later, the book, *Shifting Contingencies* (awkward title!), was passed across the table to me. It was a thin paperback, pocket-size, with a snapped spine. Several pages were loose at the split, and a page was missing, 75/76. On the cover a dark apartment building burst into the sky and disappeared into ominous clouds. Possible prestige for the discovery of this unknown novel by Stephen Corsica reeled through my head, perhaps a Department Chair, or fame, fortune, the love of women, anything!

The novel's style was his, though

the form was not like his other work. He'd never used the first person before. Besides, it seemed like a naive technical exercise lacking in conviction. But then again, *all* his work seemed like naive technical exercises lacking in conviction. That's what endeared me to his work. The first chapter is narrated by Oliver Demise, a criminal parapsychologist, who is studying the psychic abilities of C. Emerson Copperhead, reluctant sleuth. In their shared rooms Copperhead tells Demise of his afternoon visit with the suspects of the murder of Eliot Handley. Copperhead describes the three suspects, who are his wife Eleanor, his son Billy, and his daughter Kelly, as Copperhead absentmindedly guesses Zener cards. All had motives. Eliot was having an affair with a woman named Angela, and Eleanor knew. The two kids simply hated him for their own Oedipal reasons. Eliot was murdered in his bedroom, and Eleanor awoke and found him.

The second chapter is "The Son's Story." Eliot's son Billy, a few hours later, thinks a stream-of-consciousness monologue describes the estranged relationship Billy had to his father and the pain it caused. (In a flowing series of parentheses, Billy wonders about his own sexuality. He finally dismisses these concerns, since he had read somewhere that mothers, not fathers, cause homosexuality.) He falls asleep in an unpunctuated state, wondering who killed his father.

The third chapter is entitled "The Daughter's Story." Kelly the daughter sits in her room, astrally projecting herself into the space of her brother. The previous chapter was actually *her* thinking. Kelly, who narrates, is trying to solve the case using her own special hermeneutic. She considers her family romance—a moody and dissatisfied father who preferred herself to her brother, and a neurotic mother who spent half of every year at a Swiss spa. As Kelly circles the room and examines mementos, she gives us, the readers, a deeper knowledge of this increasingly fucked-up family.

Eleanor, Eliot's wife, awakes in the fourth chapter, "The Wife's Chapter." She's been dreaming her daughter's thoughts. (It is still the same night as the first chapter.) Who did it? Billy, Kelly, maybe even Angela? She does not know. Was it me? She can't quite remember the night he was murdered. She'd drunk a quart of martinis and blacked out. The next morning she awoke, her husband dead on the floor, with a note pinned to his left eyeball which read, "This is for what you did to me, you bastard." The hungover woman immediately called the police. Remembering the horror, she faints upon her bed.

In the fifth and final chapter, in typical detective-fiction fashion, we return to the room described in the first, where the crime is solved by C. Emerson Copperhead—Billy the son done it—as narrated by Oliver De-

mise. However, the room isn't at all how Copperhead described it. "Why?" asks a dumbfounded Demise. "Ah," says Copperhead. "I described for you the scene of the crime. I'm sure you don't recall your trance which your strong transference facilitated. You, Mr. Criminal Parapsychology, the investigator of phenomena, were put into it by me, your alleged subject! I could laugh if it were not so serious—deadly serious. In your trance you impersonated Billy, but, as it turned out, you were actually impersonating Eleanor dreaming about Kelly imagining Billy. You spoke in obvious paragraphs and, when transcribed, there was an acrostic in 'The Son's Chapter.' The initial letters of the paragraphs of your imagined, dreamed, and impersonated inner monologue spell 'I DUNNIT.' The case is solved. And now, my dear sidekick, I must hypnotize you again so we can solve the next case."

And that's the end of the book.

This book influenced me very directly, and Symington Mills, who gave me the book, is responsible for me now being Anna Karenina, writing these words, a story which no one will ever read, in Russian, a language I don't understand. Tomorrow I will throw myself in front of a train.

Who was, is, and will be, Symington Mills? Will he himself write the novel, making it a copy of style, subject, and manner indistinguishable from Stephen Corsica's

style, subject, and manner? I tell you, it was (will be) uncanny—close enough to be Corsica's work, yet different enough not to be mistaken for parody. So, what do you think, mirror? Was Symington Mills a demon?

I read the book twice.

Next Darts Night, I knew no-one there. They were all strangers, and I was scared of them. Their glances, innocent as they appeared, fell upon me like suffocating pillows. Someone I didn't know entered. More and more people came, all strangers. Their crowding crushed me.

All my friends were gone. I went home not at all drunk, and slept.

As I slept, I dreamed about Symington. Symington played Eliot Handley of Stephen Corsica's novel and I played Billy his son. I dreamed about murdering him in his bedroom, while my mother Eleanor slept away barbiturates and martinis, bashing him with the ceramic paperweight I'd given him that he'd never thanked me for. I was also dreaming about sex. Kelly, Angela (my father's mistress), and especially Eleanor passed before me, lips red and blowjobby. The blood spurting from my father's head was simultaneously menstrual. In my dream I bashed the old man again, and I thrashed about red and newborn between my mother's legs in a white hospital room. Symington fell to the floor, and I cried to breathe.

I burst awake. A dream. I was

in my familiar room. I got out of bed, dressed, and drove my car down Sunset Boulevard toward work.

I tilted the rear view mirror to check my eye makeup, and I saw that I was in a woman's body. I literally *screamed*! My foot slammed on the brakes. I didn't know how to drive! I, George Barons, had never learned! The car spun round and round, other cars veered precipitously, and I remembered from some television commercial *turn in the direction of the skid* or something like that so I turned in the direction of the skid and the car screamed to a steamy smoky stop. I was safe—but who was I? The mirror showed a woman, late twenties. My name was Angela; I was a female receptionist going to work.

Had to get to work, though, time's a-wastin'. I started the car, signalled politely, and continued on my way. But there was someone else inside me, maybe my male principle or something, who'd, at that moment, forgotten how to drive. Could an incubus have raped me in the night? There *was* that weird dream about killing Eliot. Let's see, day's residues, I was with Eliot last night—(!!!)—did you hear that? Eliot—(!!!)—there it is again!—was talking about his ghastly wife—(?)—: Is he hinting at something? I wonder what? That I should run away with him?—(Not on your life!)—not on your life! I should call him. Just what does he want?

Pigmonster was right behind me.

I was late. Did he recognize my car? I sped up, parked, and dashed to the office. I sat down at my desk.

Pigmonster followed closely. He grunted hello and tossed his coat onto a chair, expecting me to clean up after him. He slammed his office door. I do *not* like that man!

I phoned Eliot.

"Hello," came the voice of Eliot (or Symington Mills).

"Elly? It's me, Angela. Look I have to talk to you," (and I discarded my parenthetical existence) and I was George Barons, and I shouted, in Angela's voice, "Symington Mills! What have you done to me?!"

Eliot, or Symington, laughed lewdly. He didn't understand.

"I'm *not* Angela!" I shouted as butchly as possible.

"Who are you then? Dominatrix Daisy?"

"Symington! You've made me this way!"

"Yeah, it's mutual. Gotta go, someone's at the door," and he hung up. I dialled his number again, but it was busy.

So I worked, obsessively brooding, updating files and whatnot. *Eliot is my father—no, that's not right—Eliot is Symington (or vice-versa), a dart player at a bar, who gave me Shifting Contingencies (which I am living): I'm in Los Angeles in the body of Angela, an exploited and degraded secretary. She—(I, I'm here too, she thought)—I am Eliot's mistress, and Eliot is married, and has two children, a boy and a girl. It is (consulting the*

calendar) June 17, 1967. The day Eliot was, is, or will be murdered. I'd like to do it, though—I'd like to shoot him before his son clobbers him with that ceramic paperweight at ten o'clock tonight.

At around eleven forty-five I phoned Eliot again.

I said, "I want to see you tonight. Before ten."

Eliot/Symington pompously responded, "Well, I was planning a quiet evening at home—"

"Go out with me instead! *Pretty please?*"

"How about I meet you somewhere at eleven-thirty, after—"

"What are you doing for dinner?"

"With the family."

"What about when I finish work? At five?"

"No, I have to get Princess from her ballet class."

(He was a right self-pleased little patriarch!)

"What about *lunch?*" I asked.

"*Now?*"

"I accept! Come and get me!" This time, I hung up.

Thinking *You bastard, Eliot/Symington, I'm going to kill you*, we entered the Parkville Tavern. I sat and watched him drink two scotches. I ordered a lunch that needed a steak-knife.

I flirted with him, I told him that I'd been *desperate* to see him, I put off the point of our meeting. He rambled against his wife, calling her a hog, a bitch. My knife trembled

with outrage and ached with drive. I palmed the knife and dropped it into my purse. My breasts rested upon the table. He glanced through my cleavage. Symington. He paid, and we left the Parkville.

I pulled him into an alley, pressing his body to mine. I slipped my hand into my purse.

I cooed, "You know who I *really* am, don't you, Symington? You're in Eliot, aren't you, like I'm in Angela?"

"Of course! You're George Barons. The bar, and the book, and you—"

And I plunged the blade into his belly before I had heard him out, and I immediately regretted my passion. If I'd only waited, I could have discovered so much more! But instead Symington crumbled to the ground.

"Symington! I'm sorry! How can I get back to where I was?"

"Here," he sputtered amongst blood, "here are the keys to the car, drive safely—"

"Not my *office*, you dolt!"

Then he blew a final sad gasp, and died. I walked out and down the street, trembling, trying to look nonchalant and leisurely. I jangled the car keys in my hand. He was dead and I'd killed him.

I started the car and drove off carefully. I still only half knew how to drive. In the rear view I saw a young boy staring into the alley. I sped up, narrowly missing a parked car.

Back at the office I continued working while gloating over my crime. The day wore on. I typed a letter of the Pigmonster's and did some real important filing.

At about three thirty the phone rang. "Miller Insurance," I said. Silence. "Hello?"

"Hello, is this Angela Moore?" came a young man's voice.

"Yes."

"Um, I'm Eliot Handley's son."

"Billy."

"Yeah. I had a dream last night. It seemed so *real* that, well, I know this sounds nuts, but—are you having an affair with my father?"

"Well, I—"

"Because I saw the two of you . . . together, you know? In the dream. Y'know? And I'm upset about it, and I don't know what to do about it—"

"What was the dream, exactly?"

"Well, there were three parts to it. In the first, I murder my father with a paperweight. In the second, I saw myself being born. One of the nurses is Ingrid Bergman, I think. Then, in the third, I see you and my father . . . making love."

"How do you know it was me?"

"I don't know."

"Look, that wasn't me, that was your mother."

"?"

"The dream occurred backwards," thinking *Freud, don't fail me now!* "and in the third scene, you saw your father and mother making love. You recalled, in the second

scene, your birth and the original dyad. You were jealous, so in the first scene you murdered your father. *Hysteron Proteron*. Nothing that terrible. Every thirteen-year-old boy dreams these Oedipal dreams."

A pause, then: "I hate my father. I have no sympathy for him. I hate him so much I like the dream!" He hung up.

I went home after work. Eliot Handley's corpse featured prominently on the local news. I started to feel crazy and anxious. My stomach wouldn't unsettle, my brow wouldn't unknit, and I coughed and felt dizzy. I lay down on the couch, considering myself. Symington and I had been seen at the restaurant; I was a definite suspect; a moment's vindication followed by a day's regret. These thoughts tired me, and I fell asleep.

I think, *Bright day, I awaken!*

From across the room, my story watches me—who shall kill Eliot Handley? (A character asks: Will it be me? That's young Billy Handley, Eliot's son, who is watching me. He desires daddy's death. [Character note: he likes the lines and co-ordinates of graphs.] The morning of his father's death, Billy dresses for school, watching me all the while.)

(Or me? asks Angela [the homewrecker] as she wakes, desiring Eliot's death. She's my passionate cobra, my hell-sent demonraiser whose mission is possibly to destroy my enemy, The Great God Symington Mills, Patriarch and Pigmonster. Angela is

also looking at me, also demanding blood.)

Where was I? *Who* was I? Where was I? It was *not* my room in Toronto, and it *wasn't* Angela's room. I groped around in the dark, the unknown dark of an unknown room, searching for something.

I found a door and opened it. I looked upon dawn in the wilds with a treeline cut 'twixt grey and black. The open door illumed the gloomy room.

Actually, it was a log cabin. There was a wood stove and a mattress on the floor. Upon a victrola sat a candle in an ornate brass holder. Matches lay nearby.

I lit the candle, and there, at the far end of the room, was a desk, typewriter, and mess of loose paper. I examined the typed pages. On the top page was a chronology of the day of the murder of Eliot Handley of *Shifting Contingencies*. Prefacing the outline were brief descriptions of the main characters.

"Eliot Handley—to be murdered, leaving mistress wife son daughter. Closer to daughter than son, closer to wife than mistress. He looks exactly like Symington Mills.

"Eleanor Parker Handley—wife. Frustrated and failed poet. Beautiful and sad. She knows all about the affair. Once, Eliot wanted to plasticize their furniture, but she objected and won.

"Kelly the daughter—twelve hours before Daddy's dead, Kelly wishes him so. H[igh] S[chool] age.

Will *she* do it?

"Son—Billy. Small hands, mechanical-minded. His strings are cut. He's been dropped from his father's marionette play. He is groping around, searching for a voice upon the empty stage.

"Angela Moore—murderer?—"

I was in the body that had written those words. Yes, I recognized them. I stopped reading. I didn't want to know any more about Angela. I wanted the world of *Shifting Contingencies* to end before the murder, so I stopped reading. There the characters sat, on the morning of the sacrifice of Eliot Handley, each motivated, a democratic mass equal under the Father.

I continued looking around the cabin. Who was I? I was in a much larger body. And I had no clothes.

Outside, while the sun rose, I saw the stars sign off in the west, I saw the still dawn water of a small bay and a rickety dock twisted clockwise to the current, and birds were everywhere. It was indescribable.

After thinking, looking, and remembering, I realized that I was Stephen Corsica. I knew it from his anxieties which, I noted, were far far more severe than mine.

The peace was divided by the cut of a powerboat, like a hostile insect's drone, that had me turning my head to fix its direction. I stood on the porch and saw the boat drive into the bay. Corsica's eyes were good, and I could see Symington Mills, a younger, thinner Symington

Mills, piloting the craft.

I jumped inside, closed the door and peeked through the window.

I "heard" the history of my body. I was being held captive by Symington Mills. I had to write a mystery for him. Then he would let me go. He would not tell me who or what the novel was for. He held me in thrall through the psychological torture of my morbid fear of other people's bodies and their absolute objectivity. My fears of violation were all too clear to Symington. He tortured me both passively, through silences, and actively through words. I decided to let Corsica act and react for a while, so I could find out more about these fears. Perhaps, observing the dyad, I could learn how to get back home.

I nervously arranged and assorted the papers into presentable order, readying a defence against his psychic jujitsu. I intended to show my worth with these little notes, these cryptic mutterings which were incomprehensible and meaningless to all but me.

He stormed through the door, extravagantly appreciating "the clean air" and "the verdant textures." Again and again he repeated these phrases which made me self-conscious and, moreover, neurotically afraid, as if those two nouns, two adjectives, and definite article formed a dam which held a reservoir of violence.

Trembling, I pawed the papers. I hopped from toe to toe in tension. I was his slave and he was my mas-

ter. To Corsica, Symington was god-like and omniscient. The relationship was simple. I was naked, he wore clothes. Tears of pain flowed down my cheeks. I could only whimper, clutching the pages, hoping to shift the conversation.

I, George Barons, cannot describe the terror in the writer's body. His throat was taut to bursting, his torso as empty of feeling as the moon's craters. He was crippled, intense, repressed. He was obsessively concentrating on every movement of Symington and seeing torture's threats in Symington's twitching toes, words, eyes and heartbeat. Corsica and I were terribly scared.

I, George Barons, took control. I stopped weeping as I dropped the papers onto the writing desk. Symington was startled. "Why, my little Corsica, I do believe you've grown a spine." He smiled sarcastically, but I didn't flinch. He cleared his throat. "Ah, yes, the story," he muttered as he tried to push past me.

I commanded, "Symington, I want some answers."

Symington stepped back and wrung his hands in confusion. "You're not Corsica. Who are you?"

"You gave me a book."

"What book?"

"The one that Corsica," I pointed to myself, "is writing for you. What is this book for, anyway? Because somehow you're going to fuck up my life with it!"

"I'm going to do *what* to you?"

"What's the book fucking *for*?"

Symington fidgeted. "It's a kind of a joke."

"What's the joke? The *plot* seems a bit of a joke."

"No, no, actually the story is, um, camouflage. It's the paper that I'm going to print it on that's the joke. It'll be treated with a special drug that I've discovered. The novel itself will be just the bait, a narrative hypnosis to keep the reader in contact with the paper."

"And what does this drug do?"

"Oh, it puts the reader in a mild trance, susceptible to hypnotic suggestions."

"It won't work in *quite* that way."

"Oh? How do you know?"

"*Because I read the damn book!*"

"But it hasn't been written yet!"

"But I've read it! I will read it! Years from now!"

Symington thought for a while. Then it all became clear. "Oh. Oh? Oh! So you're . . ."

"I'm?"

"You're going to be one of my, um, victims," he muttered quietly, looking out the window. Then he looked to me again, smiled innocently, and said, "Well, isn't this interesting? You must be in a trance, in your bed or somewhere, imagining this. *That's* the drug's style."

"No, that's totally impossible! Think about it!" I could feel Corsica's frustration and anger and he wrested control. I pushed the desk over, I threw things all over the floor.

I ranted about Art, Individualism, Marx, Exploitation, and Vampirism. Some of my arguments were okay, but most were of the seven warning signs of paranoia. Symington dashed out of the cabin. I grabbed a knife and sped after him.

He stumbled through the woods, shouting, "Help! Help!" In hot pursuit I screamed at him, "You dumb fuck! You're in the middle of nowhere!" Corsica was going through some kind of catharsis, but it felt good and I liked what I was doing.

He surrendered finally. I took all his clothes. He'd soiled his underwear, so I didn't take that. Then I dismembered him. It's not easy, cutting through bone. By the time I returned to the cabin, the sun was high overhead. I lay down on the couch to think things over.

Since Symington was dead, he wouldn't be able to give me *Shifting Contingencies*. It didn't even have to be written anymore. Then how did I get here? I must have dismembered the wrong Symington. I dozed off in exhaustion, and fell into a dream.

I'm in a schoolroom, and I'm sitting among six or so other students. Two obediently wear duncecaps. Up on the board is a list: Plot, Theme, Character, Setting, Imagery. We are all quietly awaiting the teacher.

The door flies open, and in strides Count Leo Tolstoy. He is a rather short, fat man in tight-fitting clothes and a sweeping black robe. He raps his ivory cane to the floor

with every right step. His eyes are clear with the light of God, which shines upon him, an aura of purple brilliance surrounding his feet. His waxen woolly white beard bounces with cleanliness and purity.

My mind distorts from this vision, for I know nothing of Tolstoy—but *I've had this dream before, many times, each time the same terror, the same fears, never changing, always the same story*—I know, hearing myself think in italics, that *I am again in an unknown body, and furthermore that that body is having a dream.*

The fear of Tolstoy starts a twitch that shivers down to my anus and oscillates my sphincter, which releases product, and as the stink rises, a student points at me, holds his nose, and makes a face. I sit paralyzed with my hands folded upon my desk. One of my cohorts says, "Eew, Symington stinks," in Russian, and I know whose dream I am having. But can I explain this to ol' man Tolstoy, my torturer? The terror is paralyzing, I cannot move, I parse Russian verbs to keep my eyes steady.

His back to the class, Tolstoy says, "Symington Mills."

"Yes, sir?" comes a strangled voice.

Still with his back to me and the others (whom I guess are dream-extras) Tolstoy pedantically says, "You've crapped yourself again, haven't you?"

At this point, I realize that I haven't urinated or excreted for two

days. I last evacuated just before reading *Shifting Contingencies*. Perhaps I *am* in a trance, like Symington said. (But if the dream was a trance, then this, here, me, Anna Karenina, this is all a trance, too. So none of this is real. And my writing this is absurd.)

He spins gracefully, directs a cramped finger at me and shouts, "You disgusting hell-sent gremlin! The eye of God is upon you! *To the board!*"

I stand, balancing my trembling body on the desk. The two duncecapped students flee the room in tears of laughter. I walk carefully to the board. Tolstoy's finger still signifies me. His aura shifts from purple to red.

His arm falls around me, and I flinch. "My boy," Tolstoy says, "you have done a very bad thing." I agree with a nod. "As punishment, you shall read your homework." I am holding a notebook in my hand. What homework? The pages tremble as I search for the most recent entry. I read, "Once upon a time, time began. Is that possible?"

Tolstoy cuffs me in the back of my head. "That's *yesterday's* homework!" while the students titter. "Yesterday we did the Origin—we are now on Christ. It appears you did not do your assigned work. Well, then, you must improvise, Symington Mills. Begin with the nativity."

What the fuck do I know about the nativity? But Symington knows

some, so away we go.

"There was once a little boy whose father was not his own. His father was the Father of all, of the earth, of mankind. One day, after breakfast, he went out looking for his real Father—"

Tolstoy cuffs me again. "You're jumping! Get back to the babe! Style is worth half!"

"The baby boy loved his mother, and they played and sang—"

Another cuff. "Concentrate on the father! Ignore the mother!"

"Before he was born, three kings from afar came to his mother's bedside. They'd been sent by the Father. They carried a test tube of the Father's ejaculate—"

"Blasphemy!" shouts the Count.

"—symbolically, as a gift. The false father could not refuse. The kings left, awaiting the fourth of their number."

"Hmmm, good form."

At that point, I remember that I am dreaming. Why am I going along with this silliness? I shout, "This is crazy, I'm dreaming, you're not real!"

Tolstoy slaps me.

"I'm lying on a couch in a cabin!"

Another slap. It hurts. It is a very realistic dream. I grab him and slam him against the blackboard. "You're not real!"

He slugs me so hard I fly across his desk. I fall on the other side, stand, and run out of the classroom.

He is too powerful. I run down an endless hall, hotly pursued by the Count. He shouts as he runs, "You may be able to escape me, perhaps even kill me, but there are higher powers at work, an eye that sees all from which you cannot hide. This eye is upon you—I am of a lower order, the mountain has no peak, it's turtles all the way up. It is not *in* you, he's *of* you . . ." and so on and so forth.

I collapse, despairing, against the wall. Tolstoy sits down beside me, barely winded.

"You can't get away, Symington. Why do you always try?"

"I'm not Symington! I'm George Barons!"

"It doesn't matter. We all lead several lives."

"You're tellin' me!" I deadpan.

Tolstoy chuckles. A glimpse of an aged Symington Mills crosses his face. "So, you want to kill me."

"Yes!" I answer automatically.

From within his beautiful black robe he pulls a dagger. "You know, it won't *mean* anything. It won't stop here. There are many more levels, and you won't even reach them all. This is all small potatoes."

"Shut up. I have to play this out."

"You will end in a railway accident. A suicide. The day after tomorrow."

"I don't believe you."

"Doesn't matter."

"I wanna go home!"

"You *are* home."

I grab the twisty dagger from his hands. I thrust it up into his solar plexus. He smiles, moves his hand to the wound as blood flows over his fingers. "You sleep now, too," he says quietly. He slumps over onto me, and I put my hand onto his. I weep for the dead. I put my head upon his, and the dream ends.

And now I write, wearing a nightdress, scrawling these mad notes. This afternoon I saw my dear Vronsky for the last time. I know what will happen to me tomorrow. I haven't read *Anna Karenina*, but I saw the movie with Ingrid Bergman. I'll go to the train station, I'll jump before the train. It's already happened.

This afternoon I thought, where's Symington? Is he Vronsky, or my husband? But then I realized that Symington was Tolstoy, and I could not reach him from here.

Perhaps this note will get through somehow. Oh, I wish I were tired! If I could only sleep, perhaps I could meet Symington again somewhere, and try once more to settle things.

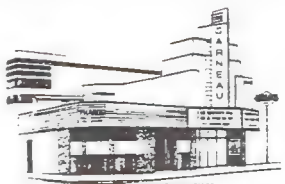
Later: I tried to sleep, but I cannot. Ideas are flying through my head. Oh, writing, writing! I write and write—if only I'd been able to write at this length when I was George Barons, perhaps none of this would have happened, I don't know. Somewhere along the way I made a false step. Maybe something that happened a long time ago put me on this path to here. Perhaps there

was nothing before this point in time, nothing after—just the existence of a hand stringing words through time, a mote of questionable existence, form without shadow, unidimensional. But I look up at the clock my grandfather gave me at my wedding, and I *know*, somehow, that I exist.

Four days ago I walked into the bar which held the dart tournament. I knew no one there. They'd all disappeared, gone off. The speakers played different music. The staff was all new—in the window sat a sign, Under New Management. Was I even then non-existent? Were those real people? They walked and talked

like real people, but were they? But the bar, the *place*, was my place, I knew the place. After I had been sitting and thinking for a while, an old man sat down across from me, needing money for a place to stay. I knew it was only for booze, but I wanted to give it to him anyway. I went up to the bar to get a ten changed. The bartender told me to never, under no circumstances, give him money. He would think that I was his good friend forever. I returned to the table, and all I could tell him was *I can't, I can't*. He finally left, and I sat trembling.

I'll try sleeping again. 



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The Boomerang

by Michael Hetherington
illustrated by Ron Holmes

I heard a “whoosh,” felt a searing pain, and realized that my head had been severed from my neck. That damn boomerang.

I had seen a dog and a boy as I entered the park for the home stretch of my jogging route. I remember now having seen them earlier in the summer, practicing with a boomerang, trying to make it come back.

Now my head lay at my feet. The dog scampered up and fetched me—my head that is—and took it back to the boy, carrying me by the hair. I was sufficiently advanced into my thirties that I was concerned about losing my hair and I worried that the weight of my head might weaken the roots of my hair and that it would fall out prematurely.

The dog dropped me at the boy’s feet and, thankfully, I landed softly in the grass. The boy stooped down and slapped me on the face, saying, “You got in the way, dummy.”

I tried to answer but no breath would come or else maybe my vocal chords had been damaged when my neck was severed. The boy picked me up by the hair and carried me out to centre field, the dog hopping and nipping at my ears on the way out. I think it was just a pup and was merely playing, but it bothered me. In the middle of the field the boy dug a shallow hole with the boomerang and put my head in, so it looked as if I had been buried in the ground up to my neck. He then dragged the rest of my body to the side of the field and into the trees where he covered me up with fallen cedar boughs and slimy dead leaves.

The boy and the dog left me then. It became a starry night, which I would have enjoyed more if I could have looked straight up. But it was difficult to tilt my head back, so I could only see the stars that were low on the horizon. A few people walked their dogs across the field that night and the dogs invariably sniffed me but fortunately did nothing more. The owners seemed to be unbothered by my predicament. Maybe it was because earlier in the month I had a sign out in front of my house (encouraged by my wife) that said, "PAY NO ATTENTION TO ME. I DO STRANGE THINGS." This sign had been intended to liberate me from the dictates of a suburban neighbourhood but had now apparently doomed me to centre field with no one to help.

When the sun came up the next day my plight was not relieved. The municipal grass-cutter arrived and cut the lawn, carefully driving the huge trailing lawn-mower blades around me as if I were a delicate sapling. I must admit I was grateful for the skill of the driver. Then another municipal vehicle came and spent about five hours tediously going back and forth across the field aerating the ground with metal spikes, which poked deep holes into the soil. Again the driver carefully went around me.

I lived in the park like that for several weeks, not knowing from day to day whether my life would go on like that forever. I was disappointed that my wife had not come to look for me and that no one had made the connection between my body in the trees and my head in the grass.

Then one night the same boy came back with his dog and the boomerang and dug my head out. He had a bucket with him and a wooden spatula. He left my head lying on its side (I tried to roll around to see the stars above me while I had a chance, not knowing what was going to happen next) and went and dragged my body from the trees. There were lots of wood bugs and spiders on me but otherwise, fortunately, I had not decayed.

The boy smeared the under-side of my head with glue from the bucket and did the same to the top of my neck, which protruded gruesomely, I thought, from the rest of

my body. He pushed a button on his watch to start a timer. "Ten minutes to cure," he said to his dog, and they went off to play with the boomerang in the far corner of the field. A few times I heard it whoosh low to the ground, close to where I was lying in two parts, awaiting reunion. In ten minutes they came back and the boy stuck my head to my neck. It was a little twisted to the right and I asked the boy—politely—if he would straighten me out. "It's fast-bonding glue," he said. "Too late."

So I walked home like that and

went in the back door. My wife asked me where I had been and had I seen any good movies lately. I answered that the Australians were making good movies these days but I had not seen any. She suggested we go to one on Saturday night.

That weekend, as we sat waiting for the movie to start—I was holding an over-sized carton of popcorn between my knees and having difficulty bending my head forward to eat some off the top—my wife said, "When you were gone for those two weeks, I did worry about you. But I knew you would come back." ➤



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Three Moral Tales

by D.L. Schaeffer
illustrated by Kenneth Scott

One: The Sea of Life

Vampires do not experience emotion; they have developed an alternative mode of interaction instead. Forming close couples, over centuries together their personalities merge to the point where each is distinguishable from the other only in physical form.

(Frederik Falsch: *Psychodynamics of the Occult*, p. 183.)

- It's dark.
- Yes.
- Are we ready?
- Almost. How am I?
- Turn; . . . a little too much color. Here.
- Umh. Sometimes I wish . . .
- Wish?
- We could see ourselves. It's such a—convenience. What would I do without you?
- Be a mess. But a beautiful mess.
- Not like you.
- Come on.
- Where are we going?

— That party, remember? At the gallery, some new artist.

— Oh. Am I all right now?

— Yes. Come on.

— In a hurry? Hungry?

— Yes. You aren't?

— Only a little. Maybe just a snack.

— I need more.

— Will you need help?

— Not if I'm in luck. If there are enough people, the time should be right for one.

— And you'll find her.

— Of course. Come on.

Vampires need not kill their feed. Like all creatures, they seek the warmth and flow of life. While blood is best, any fresh fluid—tears, sweat, urine, the secretions of sex—may sate them as well.

(ibid, p. 197.)

I found her, of course. Young, a little plump, and very ripe. I said the usual things: *Don't you think . . . ? That's very perceptive . . . No, really, I never looked at it that way before . . .*

She was attracted, of course, but understandably hesitant: ripe. I offered interest, almost without lust, and the attraction won. We went to her place, for just a drink. Her roommate was out.

It was an apartment, no more, high enough for a view, interchangeable with thousands of others. I looked for the usual clues, books, music, pictures. There was little save

fashion magazines: I complimented her on her clothes. Really? She made this one herself. We talked, we smiled, she drank.

*

It's much easier when you're not too hungry. I took my time to find the one. Lean, bearded, almost intelligent, something in media. I was fascinated and we went to his place. Brimming with lust, though I had other things in mind.

*

She was beginning to weave a little with the wine. She had opinions, it turned out. She looked me forthrightly in the eye, but shied away when I met her gaze. When my eyes found other places, she'd move or shift. Her breasts were soft, and her opinions could have been worse. As hesitation faded, anxiety grew; over her ripeness, a gentle sheen of perspiration appeared. Patience.

"You're not drinking," she noticed again.

"I don't drink—wine." Inevitably.

"That's not fair."

"Is grass fairer?"

"Oh. No, I don't . . . but you go ahead if you want."

I lit up and waited.

"Is it . . . ?"

"Columbian . . . You're sure?"

"I know I shouldn't . . ."

"Why?"

"Well . . ." We smiled conspiratorially; I touched her hand; she blushed. Really. We smoked, we

talked, she drank, we talked. Patience, patience.

*

There had only been wine at the gallery, which is best: other things change the taste. It had been easy, there, to fake a sip now and then, but it was harder here. And I had to ask for some, to keep him from switching. But that was the only problem; he did everything else for me. Soft lights, soft music, dance. A lovely clean smell, close: the arousal, working its way through the bland antiperspirant. And that lean body, flat in front, just rightly rounded behind. I couldn't resist his ass and it turned him on. He moved against me, rising.

"Let's do some coke." I put the wine glass down.

"Oh, yeah. Do you . . . ?"

"Umh-hmm." I spread it on the coffee table.

"I—" The other pressure grew. "Excuse me, I'll be right back."

"No, wait." I took his hand. "Help me fix this."

He was torn, but my fingers brushed the front of his fly. He sat down and we sniffed, then leaned back to let it take.

He started to get up. "Scuse . . ."

"Wait. It's better if you wait."

"I really have to . . ."

"Shhh." We kissed, my hand rubbed on his fly.

In my ear, whispering, "You're cold, your mouth is dry."

"It's the coke."

He was fuzzy. "It was before."

We kissed some more, my mouth growing moist.

*

"You smell so good. Here," below her ear, and I nibbled. "And here," between and above her breasts.

"What? No, don't, please . . ." she started, too late to resist. "Your tongue is dry."

"Wet it for me." She was lazy with the dope, mouth open to wiggle her tongue. We giggled, kissing.

"It is, it's really dry." Those sips, those little sips. And she so warm and wet and ripe. I pushed her shirt away, unbuttoning.

"Don't." I pushed and nibbled. "Please." I worked her skirt. "Please, you'll get me . . ." Button, zipper, her skirt opened down. The ripeness, rich, rose from her flesh, my head descending.

"No." I paused. "I mean, it's . . . it's the wrong time, you know?"

"I know. It's all right."

"No. Please."

"It's all right. Really." Her bra came off. She lay back on the couch as I nibbled on the rich ripe, the touch of sweat beneath her nipple, the armpit's edge, the soft warm stomach.

"Oh, please." I carried her to bed.

*

"I need to—excuse me, I really have to go . . . It's all that wine."

I held him back. "Wait. Can you do it," I smiled, "could you do it when you're aroused? I mean, which

do you think is stronger, for most guys?"

"Huh? I don't know, I guess . . ."

"What?"

"Well, yeah, if they're really, I guess they can't. I don't know, I never tried. If they're only, like half-way, I don't know."

"Think you can?"

"What? You mean . . ." He was hooked.

"I'll make a bet." He was curious. "You need to, bad?"

"Yeah. Pretty bad."

"I'll bet . . . I can keep you so you can't."

"Huh?"

"If you go first, you win. If you come first, I win."

"Holy . . . You really want to . . .?"

"Uhm-hmm."

"Yeah. Sure." He leaned back. Belt, buttons, zipper, and my head went down. "Wait a minute. What are we betting for?" he remembered.

"We'll think of something."

*

The first of it was dark, a little stale. She was dry from the tampon and I couldn't help. I moved my tongue around the outside and her hips responded. I concentrated on the soft ripe warmth, rocking with her hips, gentling, teasing with my tongue. It wasn't long. Her body tensed, her breath came hard. She gasped, thighs clenched, back arched. My tongue slid in, moist there now, the last of the dark. She carried higher, hips clenching. Sweet clear

fluid and now the fresh bright red. I dug in deep, sucking, drinking full. She came, warm and wet. I pulled back a little, my mouth still holding. Her hands tangled my hair, upper body twisting to look down. My tongue came out and she sank back. Sweet, clear, hips rocking, and more rich red. I drank, she came, I drank, I drank.

*

The wine was clear and warm, anxious puzzled spurts at first and then the rich hot flow. Over the coke the tingle spread from my stomach out, out to my fingertips, my toes. I drained it and it was almost enough. So much warmth, so wet, so sweet. My mouth stayed still when he was done, then moved again as he revived, sucking, sipping, tonguing for dessert.

*

When hunger stills, the rest remains. I curled into the soft lean body close—"you're still so cold"—and warmed and warmed throughout the night.

*

I flew back to the nest at dawn and paused, again, beneath the door. The old horseshoe, engraved, above the sill looked down. NONTIMENT it said up one leg, the rest worn flat, obscured. "Those who do not fear," I wondered, again, what is it they do, what message I should learn? Then I flew back to the nest too.

— *Feed well?* I asked.

— *Oh yes,* I said. *And you?*

— *Mine was soft, I said, her second day, and very ripe.*

— *I know, I said, I smelled it too. Mine was lean and very full.*

— *And very warm.*

— *Yes, always warm.* I came to bed and we made love. Slow with care at first, against the dry, but

stronger then and for a long long time.

Vampires feed on the warmth of living flesh and its fluids. Cold and dry themselves, they lack the liquids that would allow true orgasm.

(ibid, p. 204.)

Two: The Heat of Love

Like the conversion hysterics (anesthesias, paralyses), the dissociative reactions (amnesic fugues, multiple personalities) are characterized by a primary repressive component, which bars unacceptable behaviors and thoughts from awareness, and a secondary gain component, which allows their victims to engage in thoughts and behaviors otherwise too repugnant to be imagined. Although rare, lycanthropy too represents a dissociative disorder.

(Frederik Falsch:

Psychodynamics of the Occult, p. 79.)

: *Sometimes I don't always know what I'm doing. No, that's not right. I do know what I'm doing; only I don't remember. Fugues, the shrink said. Sometimes I'll wake up and just not know, but it will feel wrong. Other times, there'll be things to notice—I'll be naked when I remember putting my pyjamas on the night before, or there'll be scratches or bruises, sometimes blood, on my arms or legs or face :*

He was lying on the beach, just above the high water level, almost under a pier. His pants were torn, salt-dried, the rest of him naked.

There was no hair on his chest or arms, nor any beard despite the dawn. His eyes opened when she shook his shoulder. "Are you all right?"

"Uh." He pushed himself to one elbow. His body was lean, young, almost soft. There was a trickle of dried blood, starting at the corner of his mouth and down his chin, and his lower lip was puffy on that side. "Morning." He came to a sitting position, wincing, and looked at his ribs. "Stiff. Shouldn't sleep on sand. Hi," he looked up smiling.

"You've been here all night? You must be frozen."

"Uh, yeah." He rubbed his arms, sides. "Well, I guess you get used . . ."

"Put this on." She peeled off the top of her running suit. Underneath, the red elasticized bandeau pushed her breasts forward and in, as much as their weight would allow. "Come on, you need some coffee."

He hung the sweatshirt from his shoulders and got up, creaking. They went back under the pier, close to the water's edge, and up along the beach. He detoured to find his shirt and sneakers, then looked up, watching her body again.

"You do this often?" she asked, slowing to let him catch up.

"Uh, no. I—um, it's hard to remember. I guess I had too much to drink. I remember a bunch of us driving out here and then, I don't know, I decided to go wading or something. The others didn't want to, I guess they left."

"Neat friends." This far out, there were no more houses and the pier under which he'd slept had mostly collapsed. After a while, the cottage appeared. She walked briskly, and his muscles first protested, then unwound.

He paused at the door with the horseshoe above, engraved once, but worn with age so only part of it was legible: arced across the top, AMARE. "Amo, amas, amat. To love?" he asked.

"It's always been there," she said.

Inside, the hearth had taken the chill off the morning. "I'll make

coffee," she said, going to the kitchen. He stood just inside the door, looking around, then moved closer to the fire.

The natural habitat of wolves is tundra and steppe. Their pelts thicken against the permanent cold, but it never leaves their thoughts. Werewolves, too, hunting or at rest, cannot forget the cold.

(ibid, p. 76.)

When she came back he had the shivers, slow waves seeping up and down his body, teeth chattering. "I told you you'd freeze," she said. "Come on, you need a shower." She took his hand and led him to the bathroom, turning the taps to let the water run hot. "Inside." He let the shirt slide off his shoulders and unbuckled his belt: pale to almost white save at the patch above his sex, shrunken, shriveled with the cold. Her sweatpants and bikini came off in one motion; the bandeau rolled up over her head. The mirror caught her body: perfectly hairless; legs, pelvis, underarms; smooth skin and stomach flat down to the pristine rise of pubic mound curving to where the slight lips vanished between her thighs. The breasts were very round, pink nipples almost flat against the small pale areolae; the waistline tucked.

She stepped into the tub, pulling him behind, and switched the

stream to shower. She bent to rinse some sand from her ankles, then moved to let him under. It hit hot, but the shivers went away. She soaped herself and they changed places to let her rinse. Then she soaped him, turning his smooth body slick with suds to do his back and again for the front, then he did hers. Each time they changed places she brushed with breast or hip. They stood close, both under the stream, and she slowly turned the water hotter. "I like it when it steams," she said, shivering a little, close, her nipples on his chest, stomach against his pelvis. An erection grew; she rose on tiptoes as he bent his knees to get her above and let the moist insides embrace.

: Alone, cold air, cold snow beneath the pads. And moonlight silver on the trees, and snow. Filter air, checking; crisp scent of pine, leaves scraped free of snow, a rabbit once but gone, lost in the crisp. Sounds? Filter, check. Hunger? No, just running, free, and checking, cold air, cold snow :

Standing, it was quick and urgent. They dried, moving out of the steamed bathroom. "You're still not warm," she said. "Get in bed, I'll bring coffee."

Under the covers, he watched her when she came back in. His eyes seemed to grow to enfold her nakedness; then narrow tracing the clean smooth hips to find her lower lips again, thin and unruffled despite the strain. She got into bed, watch-

ing his eyes watching her lips, and snuggled beside him, head on his ripply hairless chest, as he sipped the coffee. When he set the cup down she moved her head up to tongue his earlobe, then hunched closer to let him find the lips again.

: Running, free. Cold snow, crisp air, almost scentless, dry. Push with the hindlegs, roll with the front. Running loose against the crisp. Brace with the hindlegs, roll with the front. Find the pace . . . now . . . hold it, push it, roll it, push it roll, running, dancing, free :

Lying, urgency gone, it took its time. He pushed the blanket away, sweating. She pulled it back. "I like it warm." She may have slept.

He found some bread in the kitchen and made toast. She sipped coffee while he ate. There was no food in the house: "I hate to cook," she explained. He didn't though, he said, and talked of going to town before the stores were closed. They went back to bed first, snuggling under the blankets

: running, free, under the sun, trees, shadows, hiding, scenting, spoor? Not yet, just running push roll free :

then took her car to town for food. And talked, driving there and back. He was in computers, he said, programming, and did what one does in town when not at work. She had worked in bookstores and galleries until the summer, she said, then came back to the beach where her parents had left her the cottage and

a fund. When summer ended, she stayed on. Not finding herself, she said, just nothing else to do.

They went to bed again

: *running, free, sun, shadow, chill, running, heat, running, running, free* : and loafed about the house. Outside, clouds held the beach to nighttime cool. Inside, "You do this often?" he asked.

"What?"

"Pick up guys and screw them limp," grinning satedly.

"Oh." Pause.

"Well?"

"No, of course not."

"Then . . . ?"

"I don't know. The first time

was because I liked you. And after that, it just seemed nice. Didn't it?"

"Oh yeah. Yeah, sure. Very nice, in fact."

"We could do it again . . ."

"No. Tell me."

"What?"

"You know, other guys . . ."

"What?"

"I mean, is there anyone now? Or when you lived in town? How many?"

"No; of course; enough."

"Look, I'm not trying to pry. It's just, I think I like you. Maybe I even love you. I want to know you more."

"I know. I like you too . . ."



He nuzzled in her stomach, tonguing, kissing, nipping. "You're so smooth." Lower. "How do you get it so smooth?"

"Uhm, don't stop. Wax."

"What?"

"You cover it with wax, then yank it off. It comes out by the roots."

"Doesn't it hurt?"

"Yes. Do it some more. But I don't like . . . hair. That's what I first liked about you."

"Thanks. Makes me feel like a real man."

"Silly. Uhm, you do that so good . . . Don't you sometimes wish, you could do it to yourself?"

"I can."

"No."

"Watch." He rolled on his back and moved to prop himself against the head of the bed. Bending forward he lifted his legs, hooking his hands behind his knees to curl up tight. His tongue went forward to touch the tip.

"Ohhh. I wish I could do that . . ."

"There're nicer ways." He slid back down and rolled to enter smooth

: *Running, brace and rolling, running, free* :

Making dinner, he turned the radio on. After music there was news. Locally, farmers were worried about wolves on the loose: a third goat had been killed the night before, man-

gled and eaten. Wolves hadn't come this close in twenty years, but farmers now were armed and talking about a search.

"Doesn't that worry you, out here all alone?"

"Wolves? They don't hurt people, do they?"

"Sure. Don't you remember all those stories, the Russian steppes?"

"But that's only when there's nothing else to eat."

Wolves mate for life; their packs are family groups. They claim their territory, respecting that of others. An occasional isolate can hunt at will, but runs the risk of offending territories already claimed. Their needs are simple: fresh kill each day or two, shelter, and sex.

(ibid, p. 77.)

The steaks were very rare and the salad crisp. "Are they too rare?" he observed.

"No, it's fine. I'm not too hungry, I guess."

"After all that workout? You've got to be kidding."

"It's not really work, you know."

"That wasn't the way I meant. Come on, eat." She took some meat.

They did the dishes and went to bed, tonguing, nipping

: *running warm and free* :
loving.

"Come live with me," he said.

"What?"

"Winter's coming, you can't stay

here. Come back to town, live with me."

He watched again as she got up, her lips now loose and pink, hanging below the smooth curve of the mound, her nipples paler pink but out beyond the breasts. She went to the window, cloudless now but dark before the moon.

"I'm serious, live with me."

"I know. But you don't even know me . . ."

"I know enough. I think I love you. If I know you more, I'll only love you more."

"No you won't."

"What is it?"

"Nothing. I'm just not a . . . very lovable person."

"Come on."

"Please. Maybe you should go."

"Now? There won't be any trains. Besides, we still have all day Sunday."

"Look, I like you, really. You're a very nice person and we do crazy things in bed. But I'm not ready for . . . permanence, attachments, you know?"

"No. I mean, I didn't ask you to marry me, yet. Just live with me a while, until we get to know."

"I can't, really."

"Oh. Well, is it all right to spend the night?"

"I don't know," she said, dropping back to bed, her head down on his chest. "It's full moon and I don't know. Maybe I love you too. I don't want you to go but I'm not ready

for you to stay."

"Well, maybe I should. Is there still a train? Or we could go in together, spend tomorrow at my place."

"No, not now. It's all right, you can stay."

He pulled her up and nuzzled her nipple. "That's nice," he said.

They were still making love

: running, scenting, crisp and warm and free :

when the moon entered the room and crossed to the bed, silvering her body where he had pulled the covers off. They lay side by side, her thighs embracing his as he rocked gently. The moonlight touched the smoothness of her body, shimmering and silvering until it took on a glow, wavering before his eyes. He closed them against the glare, continuing the gentle rock, feeling the smooth moist muscles' grasp, the soft thighs about him, silken, brushing.

When he opened his eyes, the moonlight had turned her grey pelt to startling silver. She moved her muzzle to his shoulder and gently lapped his ear. He started to pull back, but by then it felt too good to stop.

The mating bond that were-wolves form is an illusion, a matter of sexual convenience only. They lust; and then seek sex at any price. (ibid, p. 78.)

Three: The Cries of Earth, the Still Above

Ghosts, ghouls, and zombies have unfinished business on earth. Commonly, ghosts abide until an injustice has been set right, while zombies are re-awakened by desecration or other affront.

(Frederik Falsch:
Psychodynamics of the Occult, p. 246.)

When we moved back into our old house, Mother and Father gave us separate rooms but we found a passage that connected and cuddled in one bed. Head to toes at first with tongues and lips and fingers. Then straight, in front, behind, we'd come and go right on. We had to do it lots since it was our first night back.

In the morning we went back to our own beds and came down to breakfast one at a time. Father and Mother did not look too well.

"Well," Father tried to be hearty; he wasn't our real father anyway. "Did you children sleep well?"

"Oh yes, and you?" we asked politely.

"There were some noises in the night. They didn't disturb you?"

"Noises, Father?"

"Just the wind, I think, in the attic. These old houses have strange drafts. It kept your mother awake."

She wasn't our real mother either. She used to be our governess, when we were very small. One day

she was out walking with Mummy along the cliff and Mummy fell and had to die. Then she married Daddy, only the brakes failed on his car and crashed. So she married Father, who knew as much about cars as she did about cliffs, and never had an accident. The police asked a lot of questions but we were much too young and besides, they had no evidence. So now we live with Mother and Father.

"Well, go out and play, children," Father said when breakfast was done.

"But not in the cemetery," Mother said.

"Why not?"

"Oh, it's all overgrown, and brambly. You'll tear your clothes." Mother was very neat.

"All right," we said and went to the cemetery. It was on a little hill behind the house with trees around. Mummy and Daddy were there and Daddy's parents and aunts and uncles and Greatgrandad, who had built

the house. Mother and Father didn't like it much, but we had to come back when Daddy's money all ran out.

We played there for a while and did it once on Mummy's grave cause that seemed right. But it was pretty brambly and overgrown so we went back to the house and explored some more. It was full of secret passages and hidden doors and peepholes so it took us a long time to get it all straight.

That night Mummy and Daddy came back when we were in bed again. They just sort of drifted through the door and stood there watching us fool around like they used to. They didn't look too good, all white and shimmery like you could look right through them. We didn't say anything and they didn't either. After a while Mummy came to the bed and reached down to stroke our hair like she liked. Her hand felt cold and clammy and it didn't really stroke us at all, like it almost went through us instead of on us. We each reached for a titty but we couldn't get her buttons open. When she undid them for us it didn't feel right at all and then she started to cry, just tears rolling, not making a sound, and ran to Daddy. He had his thing out and got into her, lifting her skirt and pushing. But we could tell that wasn't working either and after a while they stopped. We did too and everybody just looked sad, and then they went away.

We lay in bed just holding each other, without fooling around or anything, for a long time.

But then the old house really got noisy, moaning and creaking and wailing all over. When we heard Father come out of his room to see what was happening we jumped into our pyjamas in case he came to check on us. Sure enough, he did.

"What are you doing here?" he said angrily.

"Oh, I was just in the bathroom, and then I heard all that noise so I ran in here..."

"Well, you should have run to your own room. I'll see to the noises; it's probably just a loose window in the attic. You get back to your room."

"Yes, sir."

So we spent the night alone. The noises went on for a long while, even after Father checked.

Next day, Father and Mother looked even worse. After we went out to play we remembered we hadn't done it on Daddy's grave and that didn't seem fair. So we went back to the cemetery and did and then we fooled around, looking at the other graves and trying to read the old headstones. All they said was names and dates, except Great-grandad's which had writing curled around. It was so old now we couldn't read it except some of the letters: NON, it looked like at the beginning, down near the ground; and NON TIMENT on the other

side. There were some other letters going around the top, M's and T's and E's.

"What's it say?"

"I don't know. *Non* is not, and *non timent* is like they're not afraid, but I can't tell the rest. Nobody something something are not afraid. Nobody who something, I guess."

"Maybe, it looks like it's the same on both sides."

"That's silly. If you're not afraid of course you're not afraid."

"Well can you think of anything better?"

"Not me." We had to pee then so we made up a contest. We lay on our backs and tried to squirt the letters one at a time. And that got us started again.

Then we went inside and explored some more. There was a passage that went on top of the front parlor where Mother and Father were sitting talking.

"We must do something about those children, Howard," Mother said. "I don't want to think what they were doing together last night."

"They're only children, Alicia."

"Yes, but you have no idea what their father was like. I'm sure they inherited his tastes. He was vile, Howard, simply vile."

"You spent a lot of time finding out, as I recall, my dear."

"You know how I hated every moment, Howard. We had no choice. I tried to think better of him but I know he only married me to

appease his lust. What else could I do?"

"Enjoyed it, perhaps, my dear."

"With that animal? On me at all hours of the day, pawing, poking with that vile thing? How could you expect me to enjoy that?"

"Yes, dear, I know."

"Well, do something about the children then, they're monsters just like their parents were."

"What would you have me do? We can't send them to a school, there's no telling what they'd tell people. And you won't have another governess. We can't watch them night and day."

"Couldn't they . . . well, you know, some kind of accident, playing? On the roof maybe, or the cliff."

"Alicia, Alicia, didn't we have enough questions from the police the last time? Do you want to go through all that again?"

"Well, I know. But we can't let them grow up so perverted and vile."

"I'm sure you're just imagining things, dear. They're only children after all, leave them be."

So we went back to our room and fucked some more.

That night we found another passage and watched Mother and Father going to bed. She sure had a neat pair. Not soft and juicy like Mummy's, but they sure were big. Father came up behind her when she was brushing her hair and started to play with them but she just pushed him away. Then he went to his bed

and she went into hers and that was all they did. It was pretty strange. So we went back to bed.

Mummy and Daddy came in later and just stood watching us again. We watched them too and we all got so sad we couldn't even mess around any more. That night the noise and banging went on outside the house too, instead of just upstairs.

Ghosts are exempt from physical law but in exchange may have no real effects: they cannot move objects nor block the light. Zombies, on the other hand, are bound by space to do what harm

they can. Often this takes bizarre form, as if they were unsure of their powers.

(ibid, p. 247.)

Next day we went back to the cemetery first, because it was getting to be like our private place. It looked different. One of the graves, Greatgrandad's in fact, was all messed up. The ground was torn and all lying around in clumps and even the coffin was showing, old and sort of rotten looking. We wondered what could have done that. Then we decided to pee on all the other graves too, just for fun. And then we noticed some writing way down at the



bottom of one of the gravestones where it had come loose of the ground. It said

Vampires suck
Werewolves fuck
Ghosts and ghoulies
Out of luck

"Did you put that there?"

"No, I didn't. Did you?"

"No, I never. Besides, we've been together all the time."

"Well, who did then?"

"I don't know. Didn't you?"

"I told you."

"Well, do you think it's true?"

"I don't know. I sure hope so."

"Me too. Only what about Mummy and Daddy?"

"Gee. Oh, that's so sad."

So we messed around a lot until we felt better.

That night things really got noisy. All the zombies broke loose and headed for the house, probably looking for whoever it could have been who peed their graves. They came up to our room pretty quick and just charged right in the door. They sure were ugly. Their teeth were too long and like they didn't have any lips and their fingernails and hair seemed to go on all over the place. Their clothes were all raggedy and it looked like their flesh was too, sort of rotting and falling off. They saw us in the bed and came right for us, all stiff and slow. We tried to hide at the top end of the bed but it didn't look like they

wanted to let us get away.

Then Mummy and Daddy sort of slid through the wall right by the bed and got between them and us. They held up their hands and the zombies all stopped. Daddy pointed outside toward Mother and Father's room and they just turned and started shuffling out the door again. We sure felt better.

But they were doing so much rattling and clanking that Father came out again to see. We heard his door open and then he screamed "Alicia" and we heard the door slam. So we went out in the hall to watch. It didn't take those zombies long to break the door down. Father must have got his gun because there were a lot of shots then, but they didn't stop the zombies. They just shuffled right in.

Then there was a pause while Mother screamed a lot and Father reloaded the gun and fired some more. We heard the door slam to their bathroom and then they came through there and out the hall door. All the zombies were still in the bedroom.

Father yelled, "For God's sake, hide," without even asking why we were together again and then he and Mother ran upstairs. The zombies came out through the bathroom door and Daddy pointed up the stairs. Some of them went up that way after Father and Mother but the others stayed in case they came back down. Sure enough they did, down the back stairs and when they saw the zom-

bies they just kept right on going.

So the zombies followed them downstairs and then down to the basement and all the way to the back where there was a tiny winecellar with a heavy old door. They barricaded themselves behind that and the zombies couldn't break it down. So they locked it on the outside and took the key and went away.

And we went back to bed.

Next day we could hear Mother and Father in there, shouting and banging, but there wasn't much we could do without the key. So we went out and looked at the cemetery and it sure was a mess. We didn't even feel like fooling around there so we went to Mother and Father's room and did it there. First on her bed, then on his. Then on ours.

Things were pretty quiet that night for a change, except when the zombies came to check the basement. Mother and Father still wouldn't let them in and they went away.

A couple of days later we heard a shot in the basement. Probably they'd gotten tired of starving to death and killed themselves instead. Then later the police came, because nobody had seen or heard from Mother and Father in a long time. It didn't take them long to find the mess all over and follow it back to the winecellar. They broke the door down and found the bodies. That made them get really sick. What they said was it looked like Father had killed Mother first to put her out of

her misery. And then he had something to eat so she didn't have such nice tits or much ass or legs anymore. But what really got them was his come, it was all over. Not just in her puss or mouth or ass like you'd expect, but in her ears and nose; he'd even gouged one eye and done a socket job. We couldn't figure where he got the energy to come like that, starving and all. Probably he'd just had to save it up a long while before. It sure bothered the cops though. We could hear them talking all over the house and then looking for us, but they never found where we hid.

So now we live here all alone with nobody to tell us what to do or not. In the daytime we mostly just mess around. At night when there's a moon we go out flying with the bats or running with the wolves, just being free. But we still feel sad about Mummy and Daddy sometimes.

The disposition to assume non-human form is, of course, hereditary, although the mechanisms are far from clear. It is still uncertain, for example, whether such transmogrification is triggered by the heightened sexual drives invariably found in these cases, or whether these represent merely a secondary phenomenon of the condition.

(ibid, p. 283.)

But one thing was sort of funny.

After the first time the zombies came we went out in the cemetery and all the graves were open and coffins lying around, stones all knocked over and everything. But later when things got quiet again and we went back it was all straightened out and neat, the brambles gone and the coffins all back in the ground. Except Greatgrandad's grave was still open with all the dirt piled at the top so we filled it in for him. And then we noticed that the old carving on his stone had been fixed up too so that you could read it all. NON TIMENT it said up the left arm, and AMARE, across the top, and then NON TIMENT down the right. We thought that was strange, like why would you have to tell anybody that? ☼

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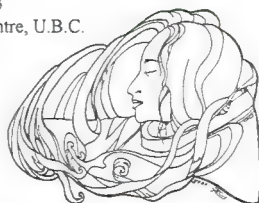
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CONS — CANADIAN CONVENTION CALENDAR

Include Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope for reply when writing to conventions for info. Abbreviation code: GoH = Guest of Honour, TM = Toastmaster, MC = Master of Ceremonies.

• **FEB 20 — CONV-ITION** — Maritime Hotel, Montreal. Memb: \$5. Info: C.P. 252, Succ. St Martin, Chomedey, Laval PQ, H7V 3P5. French-language event.

• **MAR 12-14 — WOLFCON VI / CONVENTION 13** — Old Orchard Inn, Wolfville. GoH: Gordon Dickson. Memb: \$20 now, \$27 at the door. Info: Box 796, Wolfville NS, B0P 1X0. Host of 1993 Aurora awards.

• **MAR 12-14 — S.T. CON 93** — Ramada Hotel, Calgary. GoHs: Margaret Wander Bonanno, Tanya Huff, Ronald Moore, Michelle Sagara. Memb: \$25 now, \$30 at the door. Info: 44 Scenic Road NW, Calgary AB, T3L 1B9.

• **MAY 7-9 — FILKONTARIO 3** — Holiday Inn, Mississauga. FilkGoH: Michael Longcor. Memb: \$25 to Apr 1. Info: 302 College Ave W, Unit 20, Guelph ON, N1G 1S8.

• **MAY 14-16 — CANCON 93** — Delta Ottawa, Ottawa. GoHs: Karen Wehrstein, Shirley Meier, Robert Sawyer, Greg Ioannou. FanGoH: Bink. Memb: \$25 to Apr 15, \$30 at the door. Info: Box 105, 220 Woodridge Cres, Nepean ON, K2B 8G1. Phone (613) 726-9097 before 10 pm EST, ask for Judith.

• **MAY 21-23 — KEYCON 10** — Marlborough Inn, Winnipeg. GoHs: Roger Zelazny, Fred Saberhagen. Art GoH: Bob Eglington. Memb: \$30 to Apr 30, \$40 at the door. Info: P.O. Box 3178, Winnipeg MB, R3C 4E6.

• **MAY 28-30 — V-CON 20** — Totem Residence, UBC, Vancouver. GoH:

Charles de Lint, ArtGoH: Rob Alexander, TM: Michael Coney. Memb: \$30 to Apr 30, \$35 at the door. Info: P.O. Box 48478, Bental Centre, Vancouver BC, V7X 1A2.

• **JUNE 4-6 — AD ASTRA 13** — Sheraton East, Toronto. GoHs: Anne McCaffrey, Dave Duncan. ArtGoH: Robin Wood. Memb: \$26 to May 15, \$32 at the door. Info: P.O. Box 7276, Station A, Toronto ON, M5W 1X9.

• **JULY 3-4 — MONTREAL SCIENCE FICTION FESTIVAL** — Pointe-Claire Holiday Inn, Pointe-Claire. GoH: Robin Curtis. MC: Larry Stewart. FanGoH: Scott Aldred. Memb: \$35 to June 1, \$40 at the door. Info: C. Chartier, PO Box 311 Stn B, Montreal PQ, H3B 3J7.

• **JULY 16-18 — CONVERSION X** — Marlborough Inn, Calgary. GoHs: L. Sprague and Catherine de Camp. Memb: \$35 to June 30, \$40 at the door. Info: P.O. Box 1088, Station M, Calgary AB, T2P 2K9.

• **JULY 17-19 — RHINOCON 3** — Radisson London Centre, London. Info: Box 1451, Stn B, London ON, N6A 5M2.

1994

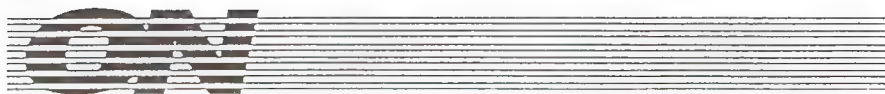
SEPT 1-5 — CONADIAN (Worldcon) — Winnipeg Convention Centre, Winnipeg. GoH: Anne McCaffrey, Art GoH: George Barr, TM: Barry Longyear, FanGoH: Robert Runté. Memb: \$85 to Dec 31 1992. Info: PO Box 2430, Winnipeg MB, R3C 4A7.

Most listings herein courtesy of ConTRACT, the Canadian convention newsletter. Subscriptions (\$7/6 issues) available from 321 Portage Ave, Winnipeg MB, R3B 2B9. Send your convention info directly to them, as well as to ON SPEC, Box 4727, Edmonton, AB T6E 5G6. We'll list Canadian conventions and author readings free of charge. Send details 5 months in advance. •

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- Vol. 4, No. 3 (#11) Winter/92
J.R. Martel, Cheryl Merkel, Preston Hapon, Jason Kapalka, Linda Smith, Catherine Girczyc, Robert Baillie, Sean Stewart (excerpt from *Nobody's Son*). Cover: Marc Holmes.



OUR CONTRIBUTORS

AUTHORS

ROBERT BOYCZUK (*Falling*) is an optimist who lives in Toronto, where he teaches Computer Science at a community college. This is his first of many sales.

M.A.C. FARRANT's (*Fish*) collection of short fiction, *Sick Pigeon* (Thistledown Press, 1991) was shortlisted for both the BC Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize and the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for 1992. She lives in Sidney, BC.

MICHAEL HETHERINGTON (*The Boomerang*) lives in Vancouver and has written several novels. The story published here is part of a collection entitled *Disputed Magic*. Another story in the collection is forthcoming in *Matrix*.

JASON KAPALKA (*Godeaters*) eats, sleeps, and writes in Edmonton, Alberta. His hobby (judging by the number of bios he sent us to choose from) is apparently writing bios.

EILEEN KERNAGHAN (*Circle Dance*) of Burnaby BC is the author of three fantasy novels, most recently *The Sarsen Witch*. Her short stories and poems have appeared in various magazines and anthologies, including *Ark of Ice* and three of the four *Tesseract*s. An excerpt from a just-completed fantasy novel set in 18th C. Bhutan appears in the Thistledown Press YA anthology *The Blue Jeans Collection*.

D.L. SCHAEFFER (*Three Moral Tales*) recently relocated from Edmonton to Vancouver. This is his first published story.

JOHN SKAIFE (*Anna's Last Letter*) lives in Toronto. This is his first published story.

ERIK JON SPIGEL (*Kissing Hitler*) is a Toronto writer. His interests include early twentieth-century poetry, modern Japanese literature, and classical music.

LYLE WEIS (*Penis Envy*) lives in Edmonton, where he writes fiction and poetry, and teaches writing to students in schools around the province.

ARTISTS

KENNETH SCOTT (*Cover* and *Three Moral Tales*) of Calgary has guiltlessly discarded his political agenda and use of metaphor for a career in illustration. So if the occasional deconstructive or subversive semiotic slips into his work, forgive him, he knows not what he does. Ken is currently working on paying the rent.

JIM BEVERIDGE (*Kissing Hitler*), an Edmontonian freelance artist, is a devout antichronotheist and mystified agnostic who has been attempting to merge the fantastic with the commercial world. A lover of speculative fiction, from the classics to the angst-ridden works of tomorrow, he seeks enlightenment in our slightly tilted cosmos and solace in "deep gaming."

ROBERT BOERBOOM (*Godeaters*) now works out of his home town of Brantford, Ontario. He studied commercial art at O.C.A. in Toronto and has exhibited in Brantford, Waterloo, Toronto and Montreal. Local theatre, portraiture and *ON SPEC* keep him busy at the moment.


STEVE GOETZE (*Anna's Last Letter*) is an Ontario animator/illustrator. He has now focused his talents in the area of technical theatre production. He is currently the head carpenter for the Theatre Sheridan production of "Anything Goes." He will also be designing the props and set for "Twelfth Night," a production due to open in April.

TIM HAMMELL (*Inner Mind*) is Art Director for Tribal Home Video and is doing cover art for some bad and good videos, mostly bad like *Attack From Outer Space*, but it pays and is fun. He continues his "Crossover" work which is a blending of the disciplines of photography and airbrush painting into a single image.

RON HOLMES (*Boomerang*) is presently working in an art supplies store in Edmonton while doing freelance design and illustration on the side. In his spare time he is busy creating new ideas to broaden his portfolio.

ADRIAN KLEINBERGEN (*Penis Envy*) of Calgary has been an artist for 25 years (some years better than others) and has tried many varied media including bongs and cardboard. He is a magician, designer, publisher, illustrator and general all-round renaissance man. For more general trumpet-bling about Adrian, just look him up at the next SF convention, where he will challenge your attention span with his heroic accounts.

ROBERT PASTERNAK (*Fish*) lives in Winnipeg and is currently working on CD packages for some Canadian musicians. An *Amazing Stories* cover is due out in the Spring; his colour illustrations have also appeared in *Aboriginal SF*, *Interzone*, and a Russian SF magazine called *Mega*.

DORY A. RIKKONEN (*Falling*) works for a Calgary retailer co-ordinating TV and radio commercial production as well as designing for print in D.T.P. Such little spare time as she can find is spent doing freelance graphic design and drawings. 

GENERAL INFORMATION

ON SPEC is seeking original science fiction, fantasy, horror, ghost or fairy stories, magic realism, etc. Strong preference is given to submissions by Canadians. Send your short stories (max. 6000 words), short short stories (under 1000 words) or poetry (max. 100 lines) to the *ON SPEC* address below.

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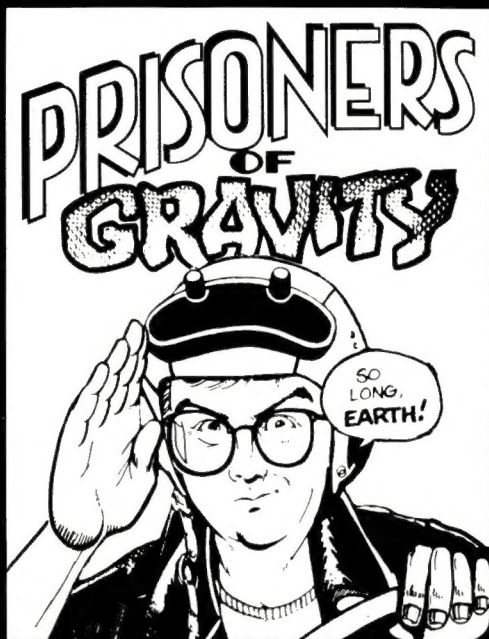
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ON TVO'S PRISONERS OF GRAVITY SERIES
THURSDAYS AT 9:30 P.M.
CABLE 2 IN MOST ONTARIO REGIONS**

(CHECK YOUR LOCAL TV LISTINGS)

TVO
OPENS YOUR EYES